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# HISTORY OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY





# HISTORY OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY

THE SOPHISTS

SOCRATES

PLATO

BY

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NEW YORK  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY



DEC 19 1945

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PRINTED IN THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



## DEDICATION

TO MRS. ARTHUR STRONG, whose friendship made me at home in the library of the British School at Rome, where this book was begun.



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## PREFACE

THE present volume carries on the history of Greek philosophy from the point at which my book<sup>1</sup> on the earlier systems let it drop, and presupposes, as any study of Socrates and Plato must, an acquaintance with the essentials of Pre-Socratic thought. Like the first volume, it is written with the conviction that the history of philosophy constitutes one of the best detective stories ever written, and in the hope that I may convey something of its excitement to the general reader or, at least to one who has perhaps without knowing it a flair for philosophy and a predisposition to feel and like the "kick" in it. Then, too, I have tried once more to sugar-coat the pill, or rather the bolus, that the American undergraduate taking a "course" in the history of ancient philosophy is frequently obliged to swallow with unseemly haste. And I even dare hope that I may help sweeten the taste of those who are ruminating the Platonic cud in a more leisurely way.

In intention, and I think I may say in fact, the present book, like its predecessor, makes no new contribution to what is already known or suggested about its subject, and throws no fresh light upon anything. It does not even try to fuse and focus the various colors and the conflicting angles of incidence and reflection of the lights by which the field is already illuminated. It seeks merely to present opinion up to date without attempting to reconcile or resolve the contradictory views of different critics. It has been written, even to the point of plagiarism, out of the general histories and the more specialized discussions already available. Nor, as the references in the text and the appended bibliography will show, has its utilization of material prepared by others been thoroughgoing. I have used only works immediately or conveniently accessible.

<sup>1</sup> *History of Greek Philosophy, Thales to Democritus*. 1923.

But these works comprise, I hope, a fair proportion of what is standard on the subject, and I have not been so shameless in my shop-lifting as to leave the original texts unconsulted.

I am much indebted to my colleagues, Professors L. T. More, G. A. Tawney, R. K. Hack, and R. P. Casey of the University of Cincinnati, and to Professors R. B. Perry and R. M. Eaton of Harvard University, who have read portions of the book; also to my friends Mr. Howard Sagmaster, who reduced the greater part of my manuscript to legibility on the typewriter, Miss Elizabeth Woodruff, who read the first chapters, and Mrs. J. J. Whitehead, Jr., who read the manuscript almost in full. The time they so kindly placed at my disposal and the criticisms and suggestions they offered have been of great assistance in preparing the book for publication.

University of Cincinnati.

B. A. G. F.

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# HISTORY OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY

## CHAPTER I THE SOPHISTS

### I

PHILOSOPHY, like the stock-market, has its ups and downs. Now "bullish," now "bearish," it tends to swing between periods of intellectual hope and enthusiasm and constructive activity, on the one hand, and intervals of mental depression, loss of confidence in the power of reason to deal with the problems of existence, and even out and out intellectual panic, on the other. In a buoyant market the mind tends to disparage caution, to build top-heavy systems, and to bid up every professed solution of the problem of the universe to a figure far out of proportion to its earning power. But at the same time this spirit, when it inspires profound and able thinkers, leads to the establishment of the great philosophies which, surviving era after era of skepticism and critical attack, never become insolvent, but prove to be once and for all part and parcel of the permanent wealth of the intellect. In its moments of liquidation the mind tends to the other extreme. It throws over not only the speculations but the sound investments of the past, and refuses "to take stock" in any metaphysical enterprise whatsoever. Its confidence in the power of reason to deal with the nature of Reality is thoroughly pricked, and the securities regarding the unseen that every interpretation of the universe must try to float are regarded, irrespective of their real value, as so much water.

But here again, if dominated by acute and powerful critics, these "bear markets" in which confidence collapses and skepti-

cism is rampant are of great use. They correct the technical situation, deflate current dogma and pretension, and stand as a perpetual warning to constructive philosophers against overcredence and over-speculation. And they help to prepare the ground and to afford a stabler basis for the revival of system-building that is bound to follow. Moreover, just as the "bears" as well as the "bulls" make money, so, however much a skeptical attack may weaken a given system, the existence of skeptical arguments and of the skeptical position is an acquisition rather than a loss for the mind, and enriches philosophy as a whole instead of impoverishing it.

The history of Greek philosophy exhibits these alternatives. The first, highly constructive, Pre-Socratic epoch crashed in a turmoil of skepticism, religious, scientific, moral, and political, which for a time, seemingly with good reason, sold the entire universe short. Upon this there followed, however, the upward swing of the Socratic teaching, which culminated under Plato and Aristotle in perhaps the most prosperous years that philosophy has ever known. And this, again, was succeeded by another, less violent and drastic but more prolonged epoch of decline and dullness in metaphysical speculation, during which a second, determined skeptical drive was to some extent countered and kept within bounds by the moderate rallies of constructive thinking, largely along ethical lines, sponsored by the Stoics and the Epicureans. Finally, with the Neo-Pythagoreans and Neo-Platonists came a third outburst of highly speculative, metaphysical activity which, supported by the revelations of the new, Christian religion and stabilized as an inspired theology, maintained a structure of unimpaired if somewhat frozen credit for more than a thousand years.

The present volume deals for the most part with the memorable period of construction initiated by Socrates and perfected by the genius of Plato and Aristotle. But it begins, largely as a matter of convenience, with the preceding critical and destructive work of the Sophists. This philosophic débacle may equally well be regarded and treated, to be sure, as the aftermath of the Pre-Socratic era, and as the conclusion rather than the beginning of an epoch. But its bearings upon what



followed are so important and so direct that we are warranted in making it the subject of our initial chapter. Let us turn, then, to consider the sources and to trace the increasing volume and velocity of this first skeptical crash in Greek thought.

Its most potent and immediately exciting causes lay perhaps, as we shall see in a moment, outside the sphere of philosophy altogether. But some of them, and these perhaps the decisive factors, lurked in weaknesses half-hidden in the foundations of the older systems, and warning of the impending fall had been given long beforehand by the perplexities encountered, but too often ignored, as each new theory was built up. We could catch the first faint murmurs of danger in the difficulties, unwittingly disclosed by the Milesian School, of reconciling the birth and existence of a brilliant, chameleon-like world with the theory that the stuff of which all its shifting rainbow-tints were made was really of a drab and constant uniformity. This murmur became ominous when the Eleatics, following up the Milesian disclosure, denounced the evidence of the senses as wholly untrustworthy, and multiplicity, variety, and change as sheer illusions, and concluded that the world-stuff could be nothing that the world seemed to be. The dialectic, too, in whose eddies Zeno loved to confuse and confute the opponents of his master needed little to become a whirlpool in which all the philosophic achievements of a century might be sucked down.

The Heracleitean philosophy was more obviously built upon a liquid and shifting quicksand. Its very foundations were in flux, and its stability depended upon their constant repair and renewal according to the fixed formula and plan of the unchanging Logos, or law and organization that permeated and governed the world-process. But suppose that this law and order, this just balance, this constitution of things, were not immutable? Suppose that they, too, were in flux and never the same from moment to moment and place to place? Where then was there any ascertainable truth, any formula that could be applied to the world-process as a whole, any reality that was more than the dissolving show of appearances taken as they came from instant to instant?

The difficulties of the philosophic task were in some measure evident to those who made a final effort to reconcile the demands of Eleatic logic with the evidence of the senses. Both Empedocles and Anaxagoras bewail the deceptiveness of experience and the short-windedness of reason when it tries to climb by its own powers to a reality that perception conceals and falsifies. And Democritus, seeking to brace his system against the flood of skepticism which had already burst, saw the necessity of constructing a sound theory of knowledge, and endeavored to show how reason might be in contact with reality independently of the sense-organs. But, even in that case, why did the same reality impress the same reason so differently at different times—witness the changes of mind through which every thinker passed? And why did it impress reasons in so contradictory a manner—witness the disputes of the philosophers? The suspicion must persist that all these changing and warring systems were man-made and relative and took their color, not from a reality beyond experience, but from the cast at the moment of the individual mind.

Meantime from other, more mundane sources currents were flowing in to help swell the volume and the force of these skeptical questionings. Trade and travel and war had been raising the curtains of the surrounding world and revealing more intimately to the Greek the great foreign civilizations at his doors. The same influences had brought the Greek states themselves into close and irritating contact and confronted them with one another's peculiarities. And the development of her empire had opened the eyes of Athens to some of the political and social, if not to the philosophic and religious, consequences of a world in which institutions and ideals, convictions and standards, were not of all one "stock" pattern. Furthermore, although bigotry might still keep the faith and ideals of the Athenian people uncorrupted by intellectual and moral progress and unspotted by the trans-Aegean world, the "intelligentsia" surrounding Pericles had experienced the purgative and liberating influence of Ionia and Magna Græcia and of its enlightened, disillusioned, and tolerant attitude towards both God and man.

Everywhere, then, the horizons of the mind were widening upon the vast confusion of human life. In the picture that was disclosed, crowded with the countless and multiform "cities of men" and the bewildering diversities of their "manners, climates, councils, governments," it might well seem that no final or single perspective could be found. The eye sought in vain some vanishing point of agreement, be it about the nature of the world or of the Gods or of the good, towards which all this diversity of thought and action converged. It met only an irreconcilable divergence and self-contradiction in ideals, beliefs, laws, institutions, rules of conduct, and even primitive instincts. The cherished truth of one school of philosophy was the detested falsehood of its neighbor. Institutions that worked well in this city would not work at all in that. What was right here was wrong there. What offended the animal instincts of one group commended itself to those of another. *Autres pays, autres mœurs*. The correct and the incorrect, good form and bad, modesty and immodesty, virtue and vice, truth and error, were modes of behavior as local and relative as different fashions of arranging the hair or wearing—or not wearing—one's clothes. At Miletus or Lesbos, Athens might seem hopelessly priggish and provincial; to Sparta, as hopelessly lost in frivolity and decadent cosmopolitanism. The only certainty that the intelligent mind could derive with any assurance from the spectacle was the ignorant arrogance of setting up the ideals and constitution of one's own city as a fixed point of reference for estimating the inferiority of all foreign standards and institutions.

The enlightened skepticism born of a thoughtful and unprejudiced survey of contemporary human life could not but be reinforced by the new interest in history which was astir. To raise the eyes, as Herodotus was doing, from the foreground of the immediate present to the background of the past was to find confusion worse confounded. The disquieting picture of the localism of truth and morality in space was now rendered all the more unsettling by an increasing sense of their mutability in time. The fixed point of one's own superior standards, so convenient for the complacent misjudgment of others, proved



not to be fixed at all. Manners and morals, political, social, and economic organization, not only abroad but at home, were in unremitting Heracleitean flux. Right and wrong, truth and falsehood, the natural and the unnatural, the correct and the incorrect, good form and bad, had changed over and over again and were still changing.

But there were other and more immediate reasons for this growing sensitiveness to the relativity of human institutions and to the futility of judging the ideals and conduct of one time or place by that of another, which might give a sharper taste to the perception of the logical difficulties and self-contradictions of the philosopher and make more biting the suspicion that there was no way of knowing whether one system was truer than another. The onslaught of democracy in Greece had tended to establish a tyranny of the many over the few and to put the better at the mercy of the worse. It had developed that inability to stomach anything above the average, be it in wealth, brains, or ability, of which Heracleitus had complained so bitterly at Miletus. With this intolerance went a tendency to refuse sound leadership and promptly to reject expert advice. Wise counsels and superior ability might be empty and intangible things which could be converted to no democratic use. They could be merely ignored, ridiculed, or exiled, as the degree of their truth or talent might demand. But if the common people could not stomach the intangible superiorities of the aristocracy, they could at least devour and digest its property with the greatest gusto. Wealth was something positive. It could be eaten with the fingers—or if necessary with the knife—and there was no man, however ill at ease he might be made by other aristocratic traits, but felt that riches would certainly agree with him.

The growth of democracy meant then a long and bitter struggle by the poor, on the one hand, to bleed the rich either by force or by law, and, on the other, by the rich to resist by force or law such bleeding. Already in the Sixth Century B. C. this conflict had arisen and assumed grave proportions in the Ionian cities, with their plots and seditions and alternations of government by democracy and restored aristocracy, both

equally vindictive. Nor had Athens in her more tardy and perhaps more stable development escaped, or was she to escape, conspiracy and violence and interludes of oligarchy.

Meantime the Athenian democratic régime ran true to form. Everyone could now take part in the Assembly, say his say on all matters, propose measures, cast his vote, and perhaps, if he had a ready tongue, catch the votes of others. Theoretically, no better school for statesmanship could be conceived than the town-meeting of such a city, where every citizen had a direct voice and an ungloved finger in the government not only of an independent state but of a great empire. Still, neither the native Athenian brilliance and shrewdness nor the comparatively high level of popular education, nor yet the stimulus of belonging to a debating society charged with both sovereign and imperial problems and responsibilities, was sufficient to raise politically the Athenian above other democracies. In such a state, says Plato, apparently with the Athens of his day in mind, there is "no necessity for you to govern, even if you have the capacity, or to be governed, unless you like, or to go to war when the rest go to war, or to be at peace when others are at peace." Nor is there any reason "because some law forbids you to hold office or be a dicast (juryman), that you should not hold office or be a dicast, if you have a fancy," or why, although you "have been sentenced to death or exile," you should not "stay where you are, and parade like a hero." No thought is given "to the pursuits which make a statesman," but "any one who professes to be the people's friend" is promoted to honor. In short, democracy "is a charming form of government full of variety and disorder and dispersing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike."<sup>1</sup>

In Athens, then, a young man who wanted to get on and make a success of his career need not be overscrupulous about right and wrong, truth and falsehood, or even common sense and hard facts. All that he needed was a bit of blarney and a flair for playing upon the weak spots in his audience. Votes were to be caught and influence obtained in the Assembly, not

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Rep.*, VIII, 557 E ff. The translations from Plato throughout this volume are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from Jowett.

by a display of sound statesmanship, but by the clever use of catch phrases and oratorical appeals to passion and prejudice. In questions of domestic legislation the most efficient prejudice to arouse was naturally class hatred and local jealousies. No promise, however hollow economically, seemed so fair or bribed so many votes as that of dispossessing the rich. And anyone who wished to make his mark in matters of foreign policy doubtless had at his command helpful devices like the old American invention of twisting the British lion's tail, and could effectively silence all counsels of experience and foresight in the screechings of the owl of Athene or by waving the Gorgon's head.

The same held true of the lawcourts. Just as the town-meeting form of government made every Athenian his own Congressman, so the absence of professional lawyers forced him to appear in court as his own advocate. And juries proved to be as easily taken in by the same tricks of rhetoric as fooled the Assembly. There was always a fair chance of successfully obscuring the rights of the case by a judicious and impassioned invocation of irrelevant matter. Accuse your adversary of affecting a Doric or an Ionic accent, or of admiring Spartan efficiency or Sicilian culture. Attack his political opinions and charge him with reactionary conservatism or dangerous radicalism according as you grasped the temper of the court. Contrast the size of his bank account with the more moderate balances of the plain people from whom the jurors were drawn. Hint at improprieties in his private conduct such as his judges were successfully concealing in their own lives. Introduce a dramatic exhibit of your weeping relatives or of the piteous victims of his force or fraud, and in a voice breaking with pathos and righteous indignation blur the eye of reason with tears of sentimentality. Your suit, whatever it was about, was as good as won.

A silver tongue, however, is hung in the middle and can wag at both ends. The rich and the prominent, naturally enough, could not sit passive and silent under these attacks. Their money and perhaps their lives depended upon learning how to give the soft answer which turneth away wrath, or to launch



the bold counter-offensive which might crumple up the demagogue and discredit him, temporarily at least, with his audience. But in order to do this it behooved them to descend into the lists no less well armed with rhetoric and persuasion, no less quick of wit and tongue, no less ready to grasp and to bend the temper of their audience than were their opponents. And even sensible and patriotic men, who put the interests or the fair name of Athens above class prejudice and partisanship, must also learn the tricks of the politician's trade. The most obvious policy, the merest decency, the simplest justice, the nakedest truth, might need to be veiled with specious trappings of bombast and sentiment in order to pass the censorship of the public. The better course could be made to appear the better, only if to all outward seeming it were carefully kept indistinguishable from the worse.

Although, then, divine Reason sat enthroned in the Parthenon, and the Erinnyes dwelt enshrined in their cave in the steep of the Acropolis, it was not to the Assembly that one would have gone to see the wisdom of Athene inspiring her chosen people, or yet to the lawcourts to behold the mighty workings of that Justice which holds both the sun to his measure and men to strict accountability for their deeds. One would have come away, rather, wondering at the irrelevancy, the variability, the inconsistency, and often the extraordinary silliness of the propositions and arguments that commended themselves to town meeting and jury as true, right, and just. There was no necessity of surveying or comparing the manners, climates, councils, governments of divers cities and different ages in order to suspect that truth and error, good and evil, justice and injustice, were relative, reversible, and interchangeable terms. To learn that lesson no one need raise his eyes higher than the colonnades of the market place or the meeting ground of the Pnyx, or compare more than the afternoon with the morning of the same day.<sup>2</sup>

No class, naturally, would be more impressed by these conditions than the new professional teachers that the effects of democracy upon the ideals of Greek education were rapidly

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Zimmern, *Greek Commonwealth*, pp. 165 ff.

bringing into being and prominence. The old "classical" system of instruction in art, arithmetic, poetry, and music had proved inadequate to meet the demands of a bigger, busier, and better world. New subjects like science were coming to the fore and demanding a place in any up-to-date curriculum. The question of vocational training loomed large, and technical education stated its legitimate claims and its advantages in no uncertain tone.

But the reform did not end here. The "classical" system, whatever its defects might be, had, after all, taught the humanities for the sake of the sport, the grace, the distinction, and the repose that they gave to the mind. In the new circumstances of democratic push and competition, however, the object of life lay in self-preservation, and the mind was sufficiently exercised by the struggle for existence and sufficiently reposed in the lap of material success. For the masses all the axioms of the Seven Sages were summed up in efficiency with the addition, perhaps at Athens, of a few precepts of old-fashioned piety. The result was not merely an enlargement of the scope but a revolution in the spirit of instruction. Education must be first—and last—practical in its aims. Its prime, indeed its only function was to help every young man to get on with all speed and elbow his way vigorously to the front through the crowd, no matter in what direction it happened to be facing. But of what earthly use in the crush were art, music, and an acquaintance with the poets? The effort that they exacted from the intellect did not make for immediate efficiency, and was therefore profitless. The time spent upon them was to all practical intents and purposes thrown away. The really helpful "preparation for life" was rhetoric, which trained one to deal successfully with town meetings and lawcourts and influence them to one's advantage. To such a study an ambitious youth could devote himself without feeling that his hours were uselessly employed. Rhetoric, in a word, took the same place and enjoyed the same popularity in the Athenian scheme of education as "economics" has pre-empted in American universities.

To this general demand for a business-like, practical school-

ing there was a quick response. In a state where everyone had to be his own Congressman and lawyer, and both political debate and legal argument were able to have all the acrimony and frequently the violent results of a duel, fencing-masters, as one historian of philosophy has remarked, were indispensable.<sup>3</sup> Just, then, as we have in America to-day our chairs of banking, our professors of the art of managing factories and railways, and our schools of business administration, so there sprang up in Greece a class of professional instructors who advertised themselves as specialists in the art of worldly wisdom and success, and promised to teach their pupils how to manage their households in the best manner and how to speak and act to their profit in matters of public concern. Some of those professors, to be sure, might have a lingering tenderness for the old humanities and still drill their scholars in outworn subjects, but the most eminent attended strictly to business.<sup>4</sup>

These professors, as a rule, had no fixed domicile. They wandered and taught wherever an opportunity for making a living by their instruction offered itself. Naturally, there was a greater demand for their services and a better chance of good pay in the larger towns than in the smaller. And as naturally, the more talented and energetic would gravitate towards the metropolis and the capital, where the democratic situation was most acute and the field for their activities most lucrative.

To the popular, and doubtless to their own way of thinking the incumbents, as it were, of these newly instituted chairs fell into the category of "brainy" men and were honored by the group name, already applied to philosophers, law-givers, bards, music teachers, poets, and prose writers, of Sophists or "wise ones."<sup>5</sup> Of such a classification they were not unworthy. To make good their promise of a sound, practical education in rhetoric they had to combine in their profession much knowledge and many functions that have been differenti-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gomperz. *Griechische Denker*. Vol. I, Bk. III, ch. V, § 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Plato, *Protagoras*, 318. E.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Grote, *History of Greece*, ch. LXVII. Taylor, *Varia Socratica*, p. 161 note.



ated and localized in the more complicated structure of modern society. They must be masters of elocution and diction in order to train the voice, the delivery, and the gestures of their pupil. They must have sufficient acquaintance with literature to select suitable models for his style and eloquence. They must know, or perhaps create, the rules of grammar and logic for his guidance. They must be expert in all the subtle undercuts of persuasion and insinuation and in the knock-out blows of direct and forceful argument. But all these things were mere technique. However graceful, mellifluous, grammatical, and logical a youthful orator might be, he would make a fool of himself in the Assembly unless he knew some parliamentary law, and his silver tongue would not carry him far in the courts unless he had at least a working acquaintance with judicial procedure. It was incumbent, then, upon his trainers to have a sound knowledge of Athenian jurisprudence and constitutional law and of the workings of the political machinery. And finally, besides acting as an instructor in elocution, grammar, logic, and parliamentary procedure and as a professor of constitutional, criminal, and civil law, the Sophist must also be a mixture of practical politician, secret service agent, and newspaper reporter. He must be keenly observant and critical of men and events. He must keep an ear to the ground and be quick to anticipate and interpret every expression of the will of the people. He must be in continual touch with everything that went on behind the scenes as well as on the stage, and in fresh possession not only of the latest news of the day, but of all sorts of inside information, to put at his client's disposal.

The earlier and better representatives of this class were men not only of intellectual ability and distinction but also of upright and honest character. As time went on, however, there also sprang up in increasing numbers a smaller fry who, like the corrupt lawyer, the cheap orator, and the "crooked" boss or lobbyist of to-day, were a discredit to their profession. This cheaper crowd were concerned only with the success at all costs of their pupils and clients, and to attain it they were ready to descend to means of doubtful propriety. They were prepared to give instruction in the dirtier tricks of the trade



and the most improved methods of fooling the people, and they had little scruple about taking shady cases and silly or unjust measures and cooking them up with unsound arguments spiced with flashy oratory. Contemporary critics summed up the indictment against them in the charge that they made the worse cause appear the better and the better cause the worse.

It is to this smaller and later fry with their inferior standards that we owe much of the opprobrium which already attached to the word "Sophist" in antiquity, and makes it to-day, along with "sophistry," "sophism" and the like, a term of disparagement. A modern example of a similar prejudice arising from like reasons is to be found in the ill-repute that hangs about the epithet "politician." Historians of philosophy long accepted without question this adverse judgment of antiquity as a general indictment and condemned all Sophists, even the most eminent, without discrimination. But since Grote's famous defence of the profession<sup>6</sup> it has been realized that no such sweeping verdict can be passed. Modern law schools also turn out among their pupils a certain number of corrupt lawyers and judges, and among doctors there are always some quacks and malpractitioners. But we should not for that reason condemn all faculties of law and medicine as corruptors of youth, or presume that every member of the legal and medical professions was at the best a whited sepulchre. Furthermore, in contemporary evidence there is no slur upon the integrity of such men as Protagoras and Gorgias, who were at the head of their profession in Athens in the Fifth Century, and no suggestion that their characters were not held in the highest respect.

Still, it cannot be denied that from the very beginning even the best representatives of the profession aroused considerable antagonism. The Sophists were "wise ones," raised above the common herd, and even above most of the aristocracy, by virtue of their broad and thorough education, their learning, and their brilliance. This atmosphere of cleverness<sup>7</sup> and distinction exposed them automatically to the dislike and suspi-

<sup>6</sup> Grote, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy, Thales to Plato*, p. 108.

cion that a democracy naturally felt for anything that had an air of superiority. But it was not only to the democracy that the distinction of the Sophists might prove irritating. Among the aristocracy, also, the quickness of wit and brilliancy of repartee which they cultivated as a business perhaps overawed the less well informed and the slower witted, and made them feel uncomfortable and at a disadvantage.

It would have been much less annoying had the more eminent Sophists been Athenian born. But the leaders of the profession came from abroad, and the irritation aroused by their cleverness was intensified by the prejudice against foreigners. That these aliens and colonials should be really superior or even equal to a true-born Athenian was, of course, unthinkable. Their cleverness must be affected and superficial, their culture tainted with decadence, their learning must include things that no honest and God-fearing man ought or would wish to know. Yet here were these "outsiders" with their quick wits and their sharp tongues, their irony, their cynicism, their suspected taint of irreligion and broad-mindedness, their fund of information and expert knowledge, collecting about themselves young Athenian manhood, inoculating it with their smoothness of tongue and subtlety of argument, immunizing it against parental admonition and control, teaching it how to get out of scrapes and into power, and generally undermining its ideals with their loose, godless, foreign point of view. Furthermore, to add insult to injury, they were charging fat fees for their instruction and advice and gathering in good Athenian drachmas.

This custom of taking money for teaching was an especially sore point, and together with the accusation of corrupting the youth, was the most serious part of the popular indictment of the Sophists. It was a novelty that ran counter to Greek tradition and shocked all parties alike. The aristocracy, which was supported by slave labor, had a fine disdain for anyone who made his living by his own efforts, and looked down upon trade as beneath the dignity of a gentleman. Social position, as in England formerly, condescended only to a very few paid

professions, but in ancient Greece medicine<sup>8</sup> appears to have taken the place of the church and the army and navy as a suitable source of remuneration for younger sons. To live by one's brains seemed particularly degrading to the aristocratic mind—a prejudice that still lingers, perhaps, in the scorn, not unmingled with jealousy, with which the university professor regards the prosperous coach who makes money just without the college gates. Nor should we forget that Lord Byron took Sir Walter Scott to task for writing for pay and looked upon his own first cheques from the *Edinburgh Review* as "tainted money," or that Rousseau had hard work to reconcile himself to the idea of selling his literary work.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the sphere in which brains were being prostituted for gain lay at the very heart of public life. Hitherto, law suits and politics had been amateur sports in which the combatants themselves trained and exercised one another's powers. To consult a professional coach and pay through the nose for some new trick with which to win a case or slip a measure through town meeting did not seem like fair play and good sportsmanship. It was a bit underhand—perhaps with the same taint of dishonesty that hangs about lobbying and wire-pulling in politics to-day. In fact it was a kind of bribery, since you paid someone else for the information and persuasiveness necessary to the passing of a bill or the swaying of a jury. To be sure, everybody who could afford it had to do it. The stress of the times and the aggressiveness of the democracy could only be weathered by the best instruction and the most expert advice that money could buy. But even those who could afford to pay the price looked somewhat askance at their teachers and advisers. So, in the eyes of the aristocracy and the well-to-do the Sophists lost caste. They were not gentlemen but professional jockeys in the race for success and power and life.<sup>10</sup>

To those at Athens who could not pay the price the custom

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> For a similar prejudice at Rome against the receipt of fees for pleading cases in the courts, see Grote, *op. cit.*, Part II, ch. 67.



of charging for instruction seemed even more obnoxious. What they saw was an invasion of Athens by a lot of over-smart foreigners who made a pot of money out of showing the idle rich how to hang on to their property and influence and balk the natural appetite of the starving democracy. In the eyes of the mob, then, the Sophists were hired champions and advocates of the privileged classes against the masses.<sup>11</sup> They were great corporation lawyers of foreign extraction, as it were, whose fees were beyond the means of the ordinary citizen, and whose superior cleverness and cunning enabled the interests that could afford to retain them always to win over the poor man in the courts and to get class legislation and measures favoring the rich through the Assembly.

Whatever its intrinsic merits might be, no philosophy launched under these auspices could be transmitted to posterity altogether without prejudice, and the teachings of Protagoras and Gorgias have suffered from the entirely irrelevant dislike in which the Sophists as a class were held. But no class were more fortunately placed for giving philosophic expressions to the tendencies of the age. Their learning and their cosmopolitanism would render them unusually sensitive to the lessons to be drawn from geography and history and politics. They were familiar with the dissensions and self-contradictions of the philosophers. And to an impersonal and abstract appreciation of the relativity of good and evil and truth and falsehood they could add the testimony of their daily practice. Not only had they their finger upon the capricious and fluctuating pulse of public opinion with its self-contradictions and self-reversals in the Ecclesia and the lawcourts, but they could cite thousands of cases of the same sort among their clients. They knew only too well how different, and often how diametrically opposed, convictions of truth and falsehood and standards of right and wrong are among members of the same state, the same party, the same committee, the same jury, the same family; how stubbornly every man clings to the dictates of his particular reason and of his particular conscience as the only truth and the only right, and lays down the law for all ac-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, I, p. 133.

cordingly; and how curiously these dictates may change in the same individual from moment to moment. Finally, they were endowed with the native scientific and philosophical interest and open-mindedness characteristic of the Ionians and Magna Græcians, and were inclined by instinct to generalize from their data and to accept without shock or prejudice any conclusion to which speculation and reasoning might lead. It was not, then, altogether a matter of chance that the Sophists should have furnished the two thinkers by whom a great philosophy was precipitated and crystallized out of self-contradictory world-stuffs and the new skeptical elements revealed by an analysis of human nature and experience.

## II

The first of these philosophers, Protagoras, was born at Abdera. The dates of his birth and death are placed by some as early as 500 B. C. and the first years of the Peloponnesian war, by others as late as 481 and 411 B. C.<sup>12</sup> In any case he was considerably older than his fellow townsman and philosopher, Democritus. Unlike most of the earlier thinkers he was a self-made man of humble origin. He is said to have begun life as a porter and to have invented the little cushion used by his fellow carriers for easing the loads on their backs and heads. But he learned to read and write—an uncommon accomplishment in those days for one in his walk of life—and, what is more, took to teaching reading and writing in country villages and the city streets, where his ability as a teacher soon freed him from the porter's load.<sup>13</sup> With success grew fame, and he rapidly came to the front in his native town. But like so many others in his profession he became a wandering star. At the age of thirty or thereabouts he left Abdera, and passed the rest of his life "on the road," peddling his wares of practical wisdom and gaining fame as well as fortune in the cities of Sicily and Magna Græcia and at Athens itself.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 111, 112. Bodrero, *Protagora*, I, pp. 67-79. Taylor, *op. cit.*, I, p. 135 note.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Bodrero, *op. cit.*, I, p. 70.

In the metropolis he made an immediate and brilliant hit. He attracted the attention of Pericles, and became a member of his charmed circle and a particularly close friend of the poet Euripides. He was deputed to draw up the constitution and laws for the new colony town of Thurii, a town that the philosopher-architect Hippodamus had laid out in the novel Oriental, American, rectangular fashion. And he is also said to have been made the tutor of the Periclean children.<sup>14</sup> Meantime his reputation and his practice as a Sophist grew apace, and he was able to charge for his instruction as much as \$2000 per pupil. At this rate he rapidly amassed a large fortune, which in its turn helped solidify the great position that his talents, his brilliance, and his relation with the Periclean circle had won him in the city. In spite of his high fees, his lectures on rhetoric, grammar, style, and literature were crowded, and he gathered about himself many disciples and imitators who dissiminated and "boomed" the new, much-discussed "Protagoras" method in education, and made their master's name a by-word in the Greek world. Indeed, he received the highest honor short of exile or death in the gift of the Athenian people; he was mentioned and ridiculed by the comic poets.<sup>15</sup>

It is an open question whether he did not in the end also receive the martyr's crown. We know that his stay at Athens was broken by sojourns in his native town and by journeys which took him as far as Sicily.<sup>16</sup> And the story is that his last voyage was one of flight. During the oligarchic episode of the Four Hundred, it is said, he was accused of impiety by an informer present at a reading of his work, *On the Gods*, that he gave in the house of the poet Euripides. Brought to trial, condemned, and confronted with the choice of death or exile, he set sail once more for the more liberal atmosphere of Sicily, but was shipwrecked and drowned on the way. (Circ. 410 B. C.) His works, the story adds, were requisitioned from those who had bought them, and were burned by order in the market place. This tradition has been accepted in its main outlines

<sup>14</sup> Plutarch, *Pericles*, 36, *Cons. ad Apoll.*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 112 ff., 658 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Hippias Maj.* Mai, 282 E.



by many modern historians. By some, however, it has been challenged and rejected, who call Plato to witness both that Protagoras was never tried at all but died in good odor during the first years of the Peloponnesian War (circ. 430), and that his works were extant and read long after his death.<sup>17</sup>

But whether none or all of his works, or only his treatise *On the Gods*,<sup>18</sup> were suppressed, the fact remains that out of five books considered authentic and some fifteen of doubtful authenticity<sup>19</sup> scarcely more than a dozen fragmentary quotations have come down to us. Of these there are only a few scattered words and two short passages to give us any direct introduction to Protagoras' philosophic views. But both the latter are enlightening and have become famous.

The first that we shall consider has to do with his religious views, and occurs in the treatise *On the Gods* which is said to have given so much offense. "With regard to the Gods," it runs, "I cannot feel sure that they are, or that they are not, nor what they are like in figure, for there are many things that hinder sure knowledge, the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life."<sup>20</sup> At first reading it would seem as if the pious informer at the recital in the house of Euripides had some reason for running to the authorities, and the fragment is commonly regarded as irreligious in the tone and prejudicial to sound principles in the Athenian young. There can be no doubt that it evinces an agnostic attitude towards ultimate religious and philosophical problems, for it is quite in keeping with the spirit, and perhaps, if only we could recover it, with the letter of the passage to add that the various "realities," and "world-stuffs" of the philosophers must, so far as the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life are concerned, be placed in the same class with the Gods. Still, it has been pointed out that there was really nothing in this agnosticism to warrant an accusation of im-

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113. Taylor, *op. cit.*, I, p. 136 note.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Bodrero, *op. cit.*, I, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Diels, *Frag. Vorsoerat*, 74 B., Vol. II, pp. 228 *et seq.*

<sup>20</sup> Trans. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 117.



piety or to shock the religious sense of the Greeks. The existence of the Gods was not denied; it was merely left to the theologians to settle, and removed from the sphere of controversial and unprofitable argument which wastes the time of the practical business man. Indeed, instead of being an attack on the deities worshipped by the city, it might easily be part of a recommendation to cling in case of doubt to the creed of the established church.<sup>21</sup> To-day, for instance, in similar circumstances we find the inability of reason to confirm any faith whatsoever urged as a reason for accepting the Christian.

The fragment, then, does not convict Protagoras of a bold or dangerous skepticism, or for that matter of any philosophic views at all. However, in another, and indeed the only other considerable passage in our possession he apparently both gives the gist of his own philosophical position and brings to a sharp and final focus that growing sense of the relativity and instability of human institutions, standards, and beliefs, the various aspects of which we have been noting. "Man," he states, "is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not."<sup>22</sup> Take, he would seem to say, the spectacle of human life in all its aspects, with its shifting and conflicting ideals and convictions. Is not the invincible stubbornness of its confusion and distraction due perhaps to the fact that truth and being and reality are really just as provisional and insecure and fragmentary as they seem to be? Is there even at the foundation of the universe any such thing as so-called absolute truth, one and the same for all individuals in all places and all times? Or if there were such a truth, could we ever know whether it existed or not, or what it was?

For reflect a little. The only world with which the individual is immediately acquainted is the world of his own experience. His sensations are the stuff or reality of which this world is composed. His mind has nothing to think and reason about except what he perceives. What appears to him to be

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, I, p. 117. Cf. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, I, ch. IV, § 4.

<sup>22</sup> Diels, 74 B, 1 (trans. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 114).

real *is* real for him; what he feels to be true of his sensations *is* true so far as he is concerned.

But on the unreliability of the senses there was no need to insist. Parmenides had maintained that the whole sensible world was all false opinion and illusion, and Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus were at one in declaring that things are not what they seem. Also Parmenides' great opposite, Heracleitus, although he felt that the flux presented by sense-experience was real, had pointed out that it was an unstable, changing reality so fluid and so slippery that we could never say that we had twice perceived the same being. Protagoras, if the account of his doctrine given in the *Theaetetus* be a plain statement of what he himself taught, and not a Platonic gloss, elaborated the Heracleitean doctrine as a basis for his skepticism.<sup>23</sup> Everything was in flux, including the sense-organs. But there were all sorts of motion, and this diversity of movement accounted for the different senses and for the variety of the objects they present to our experience. In the course of the universal flow motions got to jostling one another. When they collided, sensation arose in the organ, and at the same time its Siamese twin, a so-called "external" object, appeared, seemingly endowed with the qualities perceived. But the moment the contact was over and the colliding movements sheered off and went their several ways, the qualities that made up the perceived object ceased to exist simultaneously with the disappearance of the sensations that had been taking place in the sense-organs. The tree, for example, was itself no longer green and rough and hard when the eye was shut to its greenness and the finger numbed to its solidity. Nay, more, the object could not be said to persist even as a tangle of motions that no longer happened to impinge upon the eye or ear and to arouse experience of quality. For the original movements, whose passing contact generated the flash of sense and the spot of responsive color, had themselves changed and passed out of their old being and become new and different eddies in a new and different movement of the stream of ceaseless Becom-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. also Zeller, *Pre-Socratic Philosophy*, II, p. 446, etc. Bodrero, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 228-29.

ing. What one felt, then, to be true of the world of one's perceptions must necessarily be a very unstable and relative and private affair.

These considerations disposed also of the argument, which some philosophers had tried to establish, that there existed beyond the whirl and confusion of experience a stable, external reality reached by the eye, not of sense, but of reason. Parmenides, though he had cast aside the whole sensible world as sheer illusion, had talked about "pure being," whose nature was accessible to thought alone. Melissus had hinted at "things as they are," which we neither see nor know. Leucippus and Democritus had said that the world-stuff possessed none of the secondary qualities, like color, sound, smell, taste, etc., which the things composed of it seemed to possess. But would such a reality bear a closer inspection? Terms like "pure being" and "things as they are" are fine enough phrases, but they turn out to be wind-bags, deflatable by a pin prick. Empty them of their stuffing of sense-experience and they collapse. What meaning or character or existence has a "thing," excepting so far as it is something falling within the range of somebody's perception? That which never entered anyone's head and fell outside of everybody's experience could not be called any "thing," or have any kind of existence attributed to it.<sup>24</sup> As for "things as they are," what *are* they, except what they appear to be? Anything more than what they appear to be falls again outside of the reach of all perception into blank no-thingness. Being, then, and reality, in the only logical sense which we can give to the terms, mean appearing and being real to some individual. Man is the measure of all things. The range of his perceptions is the limit of everything that can have any real existence for him. The changing experience of each individual bounds and constitutes his particular universe, and what he feels to be true of that experience *is* true so long as he feels it to be so, but no longer.

But if no external and enduring truth and reality can be found as a standard and measure for correcting human estimates, or for comparing and appraising the perceptions and

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Diels, 74 A, 16.



beliefs of different individuals, certainly the sense-data, the logical conclusions, and the truth of any one person or group of persons can in no wise be set up as authoritative for another. It is a presumptuous tyranny on your part, for example, to call me color-blind because what I see as green you see as red and therefore call *really* red. I have a perfect right to retort that it is you who are defective because you will persist in calling something red which is *really* green. To be sure, you seem to have the majority with you. But how can you know what anybody else's sensation really is when he talks about red, and how therefore can you be certain that there is any real consensus of perception at all? As a matter of fact it is doubtful whether anyone else sees red, or feels any sensation or value, exactly as you feel it. You can have interminable and fruitless discussions with any by stander as to whether blood is red or purple; the fountain, warm or cold; the sun, a god or a fiery stone; the world-substance, Fire or Water, Becoming or Being, One of Many; and you will find your adversary as sincere and convinced, and as aglow with the feeling of the reality of his experience and the truth of his views, as you are. The only thing that emerges clearly from such a discussion is that there are two sides to every question, and that every argument may be opposed by another equally weighted with conviction and logic and truth.<sup>25</sup> In a democracy, of course, the tyranny and *force majeure* of the majority may make an arbitrary distinction between fact and fancy, normal and abnormal sensation, and lay down the law that what the minority sees as green is really red. Or it may enact it as a universal truth that the sun is really a god, or the moon really made of green cheese. The universe, however, is not democratic but anarchic in its constitution. Philosophy is no respecter of persons or of chance and changing majorities, and in its eyes the sensations of all men are equally real, and what seems true to one man is as absolutely true as that which seems true to another.

Now, if the individual is the measure of all things he should set the standard not only of what is true but also of what is

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Diels, 74 A, 20 (Clem. Str. VI 65 [II 461 14 St.] Seneca *Ep.* 88, 43).

good. What seems right or wrong to him is right and wrong for him, and there can be none to say him nay. Universal and authoritative standards of conduct no more exist than do universal and authoritative scientific hypotheses or philosophical systems. No one person or group of persons can find any warrant in reason or precedent in the constitution of the universe for laying down the moral law to another. Every man is as entitled to his own ideas of right and wrong as he is to his own views of what is true and false. And he has an inalienable right to translate those ideas into action, to behave as he sees fit, and to account to nobody but himself for his acts. Even the few genial, Rabelaisian articles of the constitution of the delightful kingdom of the good king Pausole, where beauty perforce went unadorned and the naked truth was not constrained to live at the bottom of a well—articles that may be Englished as “Do nothing to spoil your neighbor’s fun and everything else you please” would be too grim and prohibitive for a thoroughly relativistic ethics. For after all, if it *seems* right to me to knock you on the head, it *is* right for me to do so. Conversely it is equally right for you to stab me in the dark if it so please you. The crossing blades of our conflicting rights and goods are all made of the same true steel. None is inferior to another or can be broken by another. But they can be bent by vulgar weight of numbers. The weaker wrists—the minorities, which the majority call color-blind, or eccentric, or insane, or geniuses—may be forced to succumb and sheathe their blades either in outward conformity or in a prison or a madhouse.

To transfer, then, as we logically should, the doctrine that the individual man is the measure of all things from the realm of theory to the sphere of practice, and to apply it to the conduct and social relations of the individual, is to plunge society into moral anarchy. Human conduct becomes as fundamentally erratic and unpredictable as the behavior of natural phenomena. Such agreement and authority as we read into the moral order is no less a chance and hand-to-mouth affair than the stability that we attribute to the physical world, and it carries with it as little certainty of the morrow. To act

as if there were as many truths and rights as there are individuals, and as if the world-process and the moral order were liable to reverse themselves or go off at a tangent at any moment, is completely to paralyze the carrying on of human life.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that most skeptical philosophers have sought to show that their conclusions still permit man to assume for all practical purposes a uniform and reliable external world and a universal and authoritative code of moral conduct. For example, the later Greco-Roman skeptics, while insisting that nothing could be actually known about the nature of the world-process or the character of the good, developed a supplementary doctrine of probability, which inculcated a decent respect for the opinions of mankind as probably the best guide to conduct, and for the behavior of nature in the past as probably the most reliable clue to her behavior in the future. So, too, in modern times Hume blunted the sharp edge of his doubt whether any substance or law and order of causation could be found in things, by restating the doctrine of probability and writing history as if human nature were uniform and every human act the necessary, inevitable, and predictable consequence of predetermining causes.

Did then Protagoras himself avoid the extreme consequences of his dictum that the individual is the measure of all things, and if so, how did he do it? To answer the first half of the question is not difficult. Had Protagoras preached or practiced moral and social anarchy, or even suggested that there was no good reason for expecting the sun to rise tomorrow, we should certainly have heard about it from his enemies. Moreover such a doctrine would have been wholly inconsistent with his pretensions as a teacher. Would-be boxers or fencers do not as a rule flock for instruction to a master whose fundamental idea is that there is absolutely no science of the sport and therefore nothing to be taught or learned about it. Nor would a young man eager to succeed in life pay large fees for the information that all individuals were so different and variable that nothing could be inferred or pre-



dicted of their behavior, and that life was such a gamble that it really made no difference which horse he backed.

To set oneself up, then, as an instructor in worldly wisdom and success presupposed an almost mechanical view of the regularity and uniformity of human nature and of the calculability of human reactions in given circumstances. To all practical intents and purposes, Protagoras must think life was a fixed game with set rules. These rules, he might say, were not dictated by the nature of the ground, which was absolutely flat and featureless and neutral so far as he could see. A team made up of Centaurs or Hyperboreans with quite a different set of senses and interests from our own might mark out the same field in quite another way and play on it a totally different game. But, he must have added, for human beings the human arrangement of the world-ground and of the way of playing was authoritative, and local variations of convention were of no account and easily mastered. There was most emphatically a science to the game which could be taught and a method which could be worked out for training the players. So far as we can judge from his illustration of the winning plays in his own career, that science and that method insisted on a great respect for the authority of social usage, vested interests, and the privileged classes.

We need not, therefore, be surprised to find that Plato, in spite of his dislike of Protagoras' philosophy, paints the man himself as ultra respectable and conservative,<sup>26</sup> and even adds, perhaps with malice aforethought, a touch of pompousness such as is more apt to characterize a pillar than a destroyer of the established order. Furthermore, he puts into Protagoras' mouth a long argument that virtue can be taught, as well as an edifying account of the necessary evolution and the firm practical foundations of a moral order, in which great stress is laid upon the universal validity of reverence and justice, and upon the authority of the majority in determining and enforcing the right.<sup>27</sup>

But if we may take it for granted that Protagoras never made any disturbing moral and social applications of his

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Meno*, 91 D. E.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Plato, Protagoras*—especially 321–324.

theory, we have still to ask how he reconciled his practical conservatism with the doctrine that the individual is the measure of all things? The reply to this question is more open to debate and has suggested a variety of answers. The modern school of pragmatists, for instance, have hailed Protagoras as their forerunner in the wilderness and credited him with their method of constructing an objective truth and right. Starting, they say, with as many worlds and truths and rights as there are individuals, he compounded out of them, by applying the test of utility and practical success, a single universe shared by all men in common and a truth and right valid for all. His public world and universal right and truth were built up by a process of natural selection out of those private experiences and judgments and ideas which most individuals found, as a matter of fact, to be a successful meeting-ground and market-place for discussion and concerted action, and which they therefore seemed to one another to share in common.<sup>28</sup>

A somewhat similar solution is offered in the suggestion that the normal, healthy individual was set up as the measure of all things, and that what seemed true to him was to be regarded as at any rate better, if not truer, than what seemed true to an unhealthy and eccentric person. Thus the world of the color-blind individual is true for him, but it is not so good a world as that of the man of normal vision. Indeed, since in some respects the color-blind cannot be safely entrusted with the business of every-day life, their way of seeing things is a great disadvantage to them. The teaching of virtue, then, is just the attempt to make everyone see with the eye of the normal man, and "it is the business of the Sophist to make the better statement which may be the weaker in a given case, not only better but stronger."<sup>29</sup>

Another more radical and perhaps less easily defended view is that Protagoras, when he spoke of man as the measure of all things, did not mean the individual man at all but mankind as a whole. It never occurred to him, so the argument runs,

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, II, ch. XIV.

<sup>29</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.



that there are as many truths and rights as there are individuals. He merely meant to point out that the way in which the world appears to the human mind is determined by the kind of sense-organs with which human beings are endowed, and that the only truths of which we can have any cognizance are those suggested by our perceptions and capable of verification by an appeal to our sense-data. And this he endeavored to prove, not in a skeptical and destructive spirit, but rather as a protest against the philosophic fashion, followed for example by the Eleatics, of attributing to reason a miraculous faculty of knowing things that we do not perceive, and of constructing out of pure logic theories about Reality that absolutely contradict and nullify the evidence of the senses. In a word, according to this view Protagoras was not so much a Skeptic as the first champion of the experimental and inductive method in philosophy of which John Stuart Mill was so notable and ardent an expounder some fifty years ago. He was really tilting against the same *a priori* and deductive methods of "pure" reasoning as prevailed again in the earlier part of the Nineteenth Century, and his famous dictum is no more than an assertion of the modern empirical doctrine that even the seemingly most absolute and universal truths, like those of mathematics for instance, are not directly revealed to reason independent of perception, but are simply refined products of the data ground out by our particular type of sense-organs, and therefore hold good only for human experience and have no application or validity outside it.<sup>30</sup>

In the midst of these difficulties and differences of interpretation two points afford us a fairly sure foothold, and we shall do well in reviewing Protagoras to pause and bear some weight on them. In the first place, let us keep in mind that Protagoras himself never saw any harm or danger to morals and the public welfare in his doctrine of man as the measure of all things. Far from inferring from it that there were no authoritative standards of conduct and social institutions, he was a great stickler for the proprieties and a champion of the conventions, with a

<sup>30</sup> For an exposition of this view *cf.* Gomperz, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Bk. III, ch. V, § 5. For a criticism *cf.* Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.

profound respect for everything that was "established." And the art of virtue, or of getting on in the world, lay in his eyes, not in violently combating, but in accurately gauging the social and moral prejudices of the crowd, and in peacefully and tactfully winding one's way through them towards the accomplishment of the business in hand. Such a view may inculcate opportunism but it does not incite to anarchy.

Secondly, let us remember that Protagoras was utterly skeptical regarding the results of philosophy up to date. All philosophies, he saw, gave the lie to one another, apparently with equal truth. Every argument about so-called Reality could be countered with an opposite no less convincing. The faculty of reason, in spite of its vaunted direct and public access to the truth, turned out to be a far greater and clumsier liar than the much maligned senses. Perception, to be sure, gave a hopelessly false picture of any external world that might exist, but it gave at least a consistent one. Its lies were self-confessed, honest, and straightforward. It always told the same story and did not contradict itself with every other word, as did the Babel of logical reasoning and philosophizing. Philosophic speculation, then, did not correct but only intensified the errors of the senses. If anything, sense-data, being the more sober, restrained the vagaries of theorizing and pulled man back to the only realities that mattered and with which he could have any acquaintance. Thus Protagoras helped force to the front the question of the nature, object, and validity of knowledge, and made of it a problem that henceforth no thinker could avoid or slight.

### III

The other great philosophic Sophist, Gorgias, was a native of Leontini in Sicily. He was born early in the Fifth Century, and is said to have been at one time a disciple of Empedocles. Like Protagoras he devoted himself to the study and teaching of eloquence. But he made no pretense to teach virtue, and indeed seems to have felt that oratory gained its objects more easily by seducing the senses and exciting the emotions and the

fancy than by attempting to convince the reason. To this end, and also doubtless with a sensitiveness to the use of speech as a fine art to be cultivated and enjoyed for its own sake, he developed a style quite different from the dry, argumentative and legal parlance of his older "colleague." It was intricate and flowery, caressing the ear with its music of sound and rhythm and flattering the imagination with its subtleties, *double-ententes*, and highly colored figures. Frequently, indeed, these exploitations of the possibilities of language were so forced as to call down upon him the censure and the ridicule of the ancient critics. And in modern times he has been cited as a precursor of the exaggerated and baroque prose in vogue in the Renaissance, the English variety of which is known as Euphuism. But he grew and flowered and flourished exceedingly in the exuberant climate and nature of Sicily.

Gorgias' advent at Athens was a link in the chain of disastrous Sicilian adventures that so handicapped Athens during the Peloponnesian War and helped so largely to destroy her power. Before the war broke out she had already concluded an alliance with Leontini, which served the double purpose of giving the Empire a foothold in Sicily and securing Leontini against the growing power of Syracuse only twenty-two miles away. But no sooner had the final break between Sparta and Athens occurred than hostilities began between the two Sicilian cities, and by the year 427 B. C. things had gone so badly with Leontini and the other towns leagued with her against Syracuse that it became necessary to appeal to Athens for help. In these circumstances what better spokesman could they choose to preside over their embassy than their brilliant and eloquent compatriot, the Sophist Gorgias, who was already a man of ripe age and experience and established reputation as a speaker?

So it came about that late in the summer of 427 the mission arrived in Athens and Gorgias made the plea which confirmed his fame in the Capital. His persuasive periods were doubtless reinforced by the fact that it was greatly to the interest of the Athenians to prevent the export of wheat from Sicily to the Peloponnesus and to forestall the probable intervention



in the war of pro-Corinthian Syracuse, whose active hostility would block the Straits of Messina and close the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Imperial fleet.<sup>31</sup> However that may be, his eloquence won the day and the needed help was sent, though, as it turned out, to no permanently good result. Gorgias, once having got the taste of Athens, returned within a year or two. And there he spent most of the remaining years of his life, teaching his new Sicilian style of passionate oratory and delivering, not only in his new home but at the Olympic Games and the Delphic festivals, the golden speeches that made his name, like that of Protagoras, pan-Hellenic. In his old age, however, he retired to the court of Jason of Pherae in Thessaly, where he died, it is said, when he was more than a hundred years old.

But Gorgias was more than a successful teacher and practitioner of silver-tongued oratory. He had a great and statesmanlike vision of pan-Hellenism, and exhorted his audiences to forget their differences and cease from their quarrels and to oppose a united Greece to the barbarian world. And he was also, we are told, keenly interested in ethics and physical science. But his treatment of ethics seems to have taken the form of an enumeration and discussion of the various virtues appropriate to the different stations and stages of life, with no attempt to find any single principle underlying moral action or to construct a theory of the good.<sup>32</sup> And we have no record of his views on science save a critical reference to his explanation of certain optical phenomena of reflection,<sup>33</sup> and a statement that he shared the view of Empedocles that perception is caused by the effluences of bodies fitting into and passing through the passages of the sense organs.<sup>34</sup>

When, however, he came to discuss the speculations and hypotheses of preceding and contemporary philosophy, he showed himself no less skeptical and critical than Protagoras. In a treatise to which he gave, perhaps with a certain malice aforethought, the title of *On Nature or the Non-Existent*, he

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Holm, *History of Greece*, Eng. trans., II, ch. XXVII, pp. 446-447.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 71 E ff.

<sup>33</sup> Diels, 76 B, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Meno*, 76 C. D.

delivered a formidable attack on the general philosophic pretension to deal with a reality underlying phenomena, and chose as his immediate objection the Eleatic salient of this position.

His onslaught was launched in three successive waves. The first phase began with a barrage of highly explosive and terrifying but not very fatal logical subtleties, the purpose of which was to show that the ability to make the statement "there is nothing," or "nothing exists," implies either that Being does not exist, or else that, since nothing and Being are identical, Reality is the same as nothing. Immediately behind this barrage the argument was advanced that, although logic demands that Being or Reality must be either one or many, created or uncreated, finite or infinite in time and space, or must combine these contradictory qualities, logic also proves no less conclusively that Reality cannot be one and that it cannot be many, that it cannot be finite and created, and that it cannot be infinite and uncreated, and certainly that it cannot be both.<sup>35</sup> The world-stuff cannot be one, for example, since whatever is one must be conceived as quantitative, or solid, or continuous; and whatever is quantitative, or solid, or continuous must be conceived as divisible and therefore composed of *many* parts. But on the other hand, each of these ultimate parts must be conceived as an indivisible unit, and hence the Many depend for their existence upon the One, and Reality cannot be many.

When it came to the question of the finitude or infinity of Reality, Gorgias could have allowed the Eleatics to destroy one another. For had not Parmenides demonstrated that Reality must be, not boundless, but a self-contained sphere, and had not Melissus proved in his turn that Reality must on the contrary be boundless since it has no beginning in time? And to cap the climax had not Zeno gone on to show again that boundlessness is a logically impossible concept? Gorgias, however, uses his own arguments, reinforced perhaps by some taken from Zeno.<sup>36</sup> To say, as Melissus does, that Reality is infinite in time and space is, he points out, equivalent to saying that it does not exist in space or in time, since there will be no

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Diels, 76 B, 3, 552-553.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Bk. III, ch. VII, §§ 2, 3.



space or "where" outside it for it to exist in and no overlapping duration to contain it. And to say that a thing exists nowhere and at no time is merely a polite way of saying that it does not exist at all. But to argue that the world-stuff is self-contained and sets its own beginning and end in space and time is absurd, for that is to confuse body with the space that it occupies and the time in which it occurs, and is to do away with the distinction, by this time fully recognized, between the spatial and temporal aspects of the universe, on the one hand, and the solid and material, on the other. If, however, Reality is neither one nor many, created nor uncreated, bounded nor boundless, what is it? It certainly has lost every vestige of existence and has been reduced to nothing.<sup>37</sup>

Supposing, nevertheless, that in spite of the reduction of the Eleatic position philosophy still clung to its assertion that a reality did exist behind phenomena, Gorgias was prepared for the eventuality. Granted, he said, that your Reality exists, how can you ever know what it is like? To point out that things as they appeared to the senses were not things as they existed in themselves was unnecessary. The falsifications of perception were too notorious for that. But how about things as they appeared to thought and reason? Were they any nearer the real things? By no means. In the first place there is no necessary implication in thought that its objects exist, witness the fact that our ability to think about chariot-races on the surface of the sea does not imply that such races actually take place. Again, we can conceive of all sorts of unreal and non-existent beings like Scylla and the Chimera. It is no use to appeal to the evidence of the senses at this point, and to argue that Chimeras are unreal because, although we can conceive them, we do not meet with them as a matter of perceptible fact. That would be as foolish and beside the point as to maintain that a sound is unreal because it is not seen by the eye, or that sights are non-existent because they are unperceived by the ear.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, he might have added, had not Parmenides and Melissus both insisted that it was just the things of sense and the matters of fact that were chimerical

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Diels, 76 B, 554.

and illusory, and that Reality escaped the senses and was perceptible to thought and logical conception alone?<sup>39</sup>

The tables, therefore, were neatly turned on the Eleatics. If things always appear to thought as they are, then in reality, behind the scenes of sense, Chimeras must be breathing true metaphysical fire and chariots must be churning the foam of magic seas. For we can conceive these things quite as easily as we can Eleatic Being. But in that case the world-ground becomes a veritable "fairy-land forlorn" and Reality is a myth. If, however, there are in reality no Chimeras and no Scyllas, we must confess that we can conceive the non-existent as well as the existent, and that thinking is essentially no safer a guide to the nature of Reality than perceiving. Some of our ideas may be true for all we know, but what is to tell us when we are in touch with things as they really are and when we are merely fondling Chimeras? For certainly reason and logic in themselves possess no touchstone for distinguishing the concepts that represent Reality from those that reflect our fancies.

Finally, to overcome any scattered remnants of final resistance Gorgias had his third argument. Leaving to one side the impossibility of knowing Reality and the self-contradictions involved in the very idea of its existence, there remained the insuperable difficulty of communicating to others any knowledge that we might have of it. Suppose, for example, I actually see and taste Reality, and wish to tell you what it is like. How can I do so? Words are my only means of communication. But words obviously are not the reality that I am trying to transfer to your mind. They are merely noises. But how can I, by making a noise, insert into your mind a reality that is not a noise—like a color or a sweet flavor, for example. In short, it is impossible to pass anything but words from one mind to another, and hence a reality that is not a word but a sight or a taste cannot be communicated.

It is of no avail to argue that words are a sort of composite reality made up of the sense-data that they represent. For in that case they certainly do not resemble the realities of

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

which they are composed, and are particularly unlike visible bodies. The heard reality "red," for instance, is quite unlike the seen reality "red." Moreover, the spoken word, even though it be composed of sights, is perceived only by the ear, whereas it takes an eye to do the seeing. Once more, then, how can a sound transfer a sight from me to you? How can words convey my vision of the truth.<sup>40</sup>

The mechanism of this argument may seem to us clumsy and antiquated, but it has a longer range and a greater effectiveness than would appear at first sight. It has not, indeed, held up the advance of philosophy, but it cannot be altogether silenced, even by such modern psychological artillery as the doctrines of the association of ideas and the symbolism of language, with which we seek to defend the possibility of communicating experience and knowledge from individual to individual. For Gorgias might have taken a leaf from the book of Protagoras and asked how we can ever be sure that a word is associated with the same sense-data or ideas in the mind of one individual as it is in another. If I utter the sound "red," for example, I convey to the mind of a color-blind person a sensation quite different from that in my own consciousness. If we talk about yonder "house" or "tree" or "cow," I have no means of knowing whether the picture before your eyes is similar to that before mine. And what teacher of any subject is ever quite sure that by his lectures he has succeeded in reproducing his ideas in the heads of his pupils? Indeed, could he open up their brains and "listen in" upon their thoughts, how strangely unlike his concepts his words would sound to him! But we cannot get inside the experience of other individuals and directly perceive and compare the sense-data associated with the same word in their several minds. For that matter, we cannot even be sure that the word itself sounds the same to them as it does to us, or to you as it does to me, since we can only hear it, each with his own ears.

As we have said, a position defended by this argument cannot be reduced. We never can be certain that two individuals are having the same sensations, images, and thoughts, even

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Diels, 76 B. 3, 554, 555.



when they are using the same words to express their experiences. All that we can do is to point out that words do not need to call up the same picture in order to stand for the same thing in different minds and convey knowledge from one to another. They need only stand for and suggest similar points of reference and ways of behavior with respect to the experience in question. Thus the sound "red," though it is associated with very different visual sensations in color-blind and normal persons, seems to occur in the minds of both alike in similar circumstances, and to occupy a like position in such clumps of experience as blood, or socialistic neckties, or rags that anger bulls. Again, when we discuss a motor-car or a locomotive together, we can neither of us be sure that the one is seeing either the whole mechanism or any of its parts just as the other sees it; but as we enumerate its constituents we agree upon their functions and positions with regard to one another, and, therefore, upon their names. And the whole, again, suggests to both of us something that is *treated*, even if it is not *seen*, in the same manner, and that therefore can be symbolized by the same word.

Gorgias' other two arguments, also, whatever we may think of their cogency, at least unmask important weaknesses in the work of all philosophic construction, which have never been repaired, and which have served again and again as points of assault for skeptical thinkers. His first argument, for instance, cannot but remind us of the objections urged by Berkeley against the concept of a physical matter existing behind sense-phenomena, or of the criticisms developed by Locke and Hume of the notion of "substance" as something more than and different from the sum of its sensible qualities.<sup>41</sup> And Kant, it will be remembered, found the contradictions of finitude and infinity in space and time, of unity and plurality, and of causation and self-determination, so hopeless that he made of them mere subjective peculiarities in our mental machinery, and proclaimed that they had no application to Reality, which was unknowable and indescribable in any of the ideas and categories at the disposal of the human intelligence.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Grote, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII, Part II, ch. LXVII.

Like Protagoras, Gorgias never seems to have extended his attack to include morals or even the experimental sciences. As we have seen, he conducted experiments in optics, and still clung to at least some of the psychology of Empedocles, even after he had become wholly skeptical as to the pretensions of all philosophical systems. Nor is there any evidence to show that his ethical teaching was ever considered in any way unsettling or subversive or radical. Virtue and vice, indeed, might be "relative to the actions and ages of each of us in all that we do,"<sup>42</sup> but the lesson that he appears to have deduced was the highly anti-revolutionary and edifying conclusion that everyone should perform the duties of that station in life to which it had pleased the Gods to call him, without aspiring to interfere in the affairs of his betters. A man, for example, has his particular place or virtue, and a woman hers.<sup>43</sup> Such a doctrine, indeed, foreshadows the Platonic view that in a virtuous state every man will find his own level and stick to the job for which he is fitted, and that the root of all political evil is unwillingness to stop where one belongs.

## IV

Protagoras and Gorgias, then, had contented themselves with demolishing the Realities and world-grounds constructed behind the world of sense-perception by *a priori* methods of pure reasoning, and had urged their main objections against the Eleatic School. They had made, nevertheless, a breach in the general notion of truth and order and system in things which might render impossible the rational defense of any position whatsoever, and they had left ethics in a particularly exposed and precarious situation. Moreover, politicians like Callicles and Sophists of the type of Thrasymachus were already taking advantage of the situation to subject the common notions of right and justice to a destructive criticism. Thus Callicles insisted that "custom and nature are generally at variance with one another,"<sup>44</sup> and that the prohibitions and sanctions

<sup>42</sup> Plato, *Meno*, 72 A.

<sup>43</sup> Plato, *Meno*, 71 E.

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 482 E.



of conventional morality are merely the inventions of the "many weak" to protect themselves against the natural right of the fewer strong to exploit them. In this way morality had inverted the order of nature and enabled the weak to enslave the strong and to wrong and trample upon them. For, Callicles goes on, "the makers of laws are the many weak; and they make laws and distribute praises and censures with a view to themselves and to their own interests. . . . And, therefore, this seeking (on the part of the few strong) to have more than the many is conventionally said to be shameful and unjust and is called injustice, whereas nature herself intimates that it is just for the better to have more than the worse, the more powerful than the weaker; and in many ways she shows, among men as well as among animals, and indeed among whole cities and races, that justice consists in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior."<sup>45</sup>

These views, it will be noted, were by no means wholly negative and skeptical, and Callicles was not turning Sophistic agnosticism against all morality indiscriminately. He might feel that the commandments imposed by the majority had no weight, save that of numbers, behind them and therefore imposed no obligation on anyone strong enough to defy them, but he insisted none the less that there was such a thing as a right and a wrong inherent in the natural order. What nature sanctioned, however, was not a democratic but an aristocratic ethics in which the strong, able, gifted few, rather than the mediocre many, laid down the law and set the pace. It was natural and therefore right that the fittest to live and make the most of life should survive and succeed, and it was contrary to nature and therefore wrong that they should be hampered by artificial obstacles placed in their way by the unfit and the weaklings.

We are reminded not a little of Nietzsche and of his indictment of Christian ethics as a slave-morality designed to nullify the inalienable right of the strong to rule the weak and to postpone the inevitable day when the "superman" should appear upon the earth and trample the vulgar herd beneath his feet. Indeed, it has been pointed out<sup>46</sup> that Callicles, although an

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 483 B ff.

<sup>46</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 120, 121.

upholder of the democratic government, was also a child of his century, voicing, like Carlyle and Nietzsche in recent times, a widespread reaction against the vicious tendency of a democratic age to condemn and abolish everything of which everybody is not capable and to level all men down to an average mediocrity. Then, as yesterday, the "hero" and the "strong man" were coming into their own again as the objects of a revived cult. Callicles himself appeals to the example of Heracles who "carried off the oxen of Geryon, according to the law of natural right, and that the other possessions of the weaker and inferior properly belong to the stronger and superior."<sup>47</sup> And, for that matter, the Athenian democracy itself was willing enough to do "violence with a high hand" in dealing with smaller states that stood in its way—as when, without even consulting her, it inscribed Melos on the list of tributary members of the Empire and answered her appeal for justice by remarking "you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must."<sup>48</sup>

The *real-politik* of the Melian episode perhaps goes Callicles one better, and suggests, if anything, the views of Thrasymachus. For Callicles, though he turns the traditional and conventional notions of right and wrong topsy-turvy, finds that there are natural sanctions and standards for the morality he advocates. But Thrasymachus flatly denies that any such standards or sanctions exist. There is not even a natural right that the strong should rule the weak. They rule solely through the accident of their power, and it is their arbitrary will that determines what shall be right and what wrong. There is no moral order, no Justice in things such as Heracleitus and Aeschylus had dreamed of, and even Callicles in his violent way had admitted. "Justice," Thrasymachus says, "is nothing else than the interest of the stronger."<sup>49</sup> The different

<sup>47</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 484 B.

<sup>48</sup> Thucydides, V, 89 (trans. Crawley) quoted Zimmern, *Greek Commonwealth*, p. 435—for which see a résumé of the Melian episode.

<sup>49</sup> Plato, *Rep.*, I, 338 C.

forms of government, whether tyrannies, aristocracies, or democracies, "make laws democratical, aristocratical, tyrannical, with a view to their several interests; and these laws, which are made by them for their own interests, are the justice which they deliver to their subjects, and him who transgresses them they punish as a breaker of the law, and unjust. . . . In all states there is the same principle of justice, which is the interest of the government; and as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion is that everywhere there is one principle of justice which is the interest of the stronger."<sup>50</sup>

In such circumstances the relation of the individual to the government is really one of chronic opposition and rebellion. "Justice and the just," Thrasyarchus goes on, "are in reality another's good," not one's own. It is always to the interest of the individual to evade and disobey the law so far as he can do so with impunity. Nay more, if we are to prate in terms of old-fashioned morality, it is easy to show that as a rule injustice and wrong-doing pay much better than justice and right. The so-called just man, who obeys the law, loses by his honesty in business and taxation and politics, whereas the unscrupulous and so-called unjust man almost always wins. Indeed, the bigger the scale on which a rascal operates, the greater is his success and happiness. The tyrant, for example, might be disgraced and punished if he retailed his acts; but when he confiscates property wholesale and enslaves his fellow-citizens *en masse*, he "is termed happy and blessed, not only by the citizens, but by all who hear of his having achieved the consummation of injustice. For mankind censure injustice, fearing that they may be the victims of it, and not because they shrink from committing it. And thus . . . injustice, when on a sufficient scale has more strength and freedom and mastery than justice." Justice then, "is the interest of the stronger, whereas injustice is a man's own profit and interest."<sup>51</sup>

Doubtless the bark of both Thrasyarchus and Callicles was worse than their bite. But plainly, too, sleeping dogs had been aroused which would no longer lie. The skepticism and

<sup>50</sup> *Rep.*, I, 338 E. *et seq.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 343 C—344 D.



unrest of the age were at last in full cry on the scent of traditional morality. The old established sanctions of conduct and standards of right and wrong, and even the very idea of any moral order at all in things, were being pulled to pieces with the same ruthlessness as characterized the attacks of Protagoras and Gorgias upon the concept of a natural order or world-ground underlying the flux of sense. Just, then, as Protagoras and Gorgias had raised the problem of the possibility and extent of human knowledge, so Thrasymachus and Callicles and their like pushed to the fore the no less important question of the nature of the moral good and the character and extent of its hold upon human life. Men could no longer mistake custom and tradition for authority and accept the so-called moral law without questioning. They must be prepared, rather, to give a rational account and defense of the objects and justifications of their activities and institutions. Henceforth no philosopher could avoid the problems of ethics, and no system could pretend to any completeness that did not attempt their solution. Already, Democritus had supplemented his atomic and mechanical hypothesis regarding the nature of the world-ground with a discussion of ethics as well as a theory of knowledge, and the loss of his moral treatises was a great calamity for the history of philosophy. And in Athens itself, at the very heart of the skeptical movement, Socrates was making the determined attempt, which will form the subject of the next chapter, to work out an ethical theory on a sound and rational basis fit to withstand and even to confute arguments like those of Callicles and Thrasymachus.

It is a traditional but none the less true summary of the age of the Sophists to say that it was an epoch in which the eye of the mind was turned inwards, not outwards, and the interest of philosophy was shifted from external reality to human life. Man had been suddenly stripped of the background of nature with which, according to the Greeks, he was associated with such peculiar intimacy. The confraternity with the Gods, the kinship with natural phenomena, the sense of a deep-seated Justice and balance governing both men and things—for the fear of which the very sun dares not “overstep his measures”—all

these had been called into question along with the systems of the philosophers. Nay more, destruction threatened such law and organization as might linger on in human life through tradition and convention after their natural affinities and supports in an external world had been swept away.

Man, in a word, instead of being half lost to his own sight in the absorbing spectacle of the objective universe and of his speculations regarding its nature, now stood alone, thrown into relief against a great darkness with nothing but himself to arrest his attention and engage his thoughts. Each individual was the sole source of his own light, and the surrounding blankness did but reflect back to him the fitful visions cast by his particular desires and thoughts upon the thickness of its night. Even the seeming congregation of these lonely points of light and life into fixed constellations of social and moral order had been challenged as arbitrary and artificial, and dissolved into a host of wandering stars pursuing each its own flickering and erratic path against the background of the unknown and the non-existent.

The work of reorganization and reconstruction, whatever it might recover of traditional standards and previous systems, went on, then, of necessity in a new atmosphere. The old had to be worn with a difference. Man could not again lose sight of himself in any new objective universe, however engrossing, that his reviving speculations might descry. He had realized once and for all that he was at least as interesting and important to himself as was the outer world, and that his existence and nature set philosophy no less profound and difficult problems. It was, after all, the light of his mind, wherever it might come from, that discovered Reality in the darkness, and the glow of his desires, whatever might kindle them, that warmed it into beauty and goodness. If he was not the "measure" of all things, he was at any rate an integral and vital part of them. No matter how many former threads and designs philosophy might reweave into her next world-stuff, his sensations, thoughts, desires, and ideals must figure there in shining and distinctive colors, and enter largely into the spinning of its pattern.



## CHAPTER II

### SOCRATES

#### I

SOCRATES, born about 470 B. C., is the first philosopher of note to claim Athens as his birthplace. He was the son of a respectable and well-to-do bourgeois couple, a sculptor and a midwife, who seem to have stood well in their respective professions and to have enjoyed the friendship of their richer and more aristocratic neighbours. He was very likely brought up to his father's trade,<sup>1</sup> but even as a boy he was of a dreamy and mystical temperament that verged on eccentricity. He frequently heard a voice, of divine origin as he thought, warning him against something that he was minded to do—although curiously enough it never suggested to him any positive course of action. He was given also to falling into "brown studies," or trance-like states in which he would remain for hours at a time, unconscious of everything that was going on about him. Once indeed, in camp, one of these trances lasted for a day and a night, much to the astonishment of his fellow-soldiers who observed and took the trouble to time it. It is not surprising that such a character, naturally fascinated by religious and philosophical speculations, was soon lured away from the paternal workshop and, for that matter, from any settled means of making a living.

But Socrates was no visionary and impractical ne'er-do-weel, and if at an early age he chose a life of poverty and vagabondage, it was not for lack of ability and moral fibre. His mysticism was balanced by strong ethical and political convictions and by an iron will in sticking to them through thick and thin. Nothing could induce him to do anything that he considered

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Zeller, *Socrates and the Socratic Schools*, p. 54.

wrong or prevent him from doing anything that he thought right. He withstood with equal composure the blandishments of his lover Alcibiades and the belaborings of his wife Xantippe, whose reputation as a scold has become proverbial but is doubtless exaggerated. Nor in his old age, when he happened to preside over the trial of the Athenian generals who had abandoned their dead after the battle of Arginusae, would he give way to the infuriated demands of the Assembly that all concerned should be tried illegally under a single indictment. He refused to put the question to the vote, but his resistance was overruled to the lasting shame of the Athenian people. Also, during the oligarchic episode of the Thirty Tyrants he braved the wrath of the government and endangered his life by declining to make an illegal arrest at its orders.

Moreover, he possessed not merely the moral courage of his convictions. In the campaigns in which he took part he displayed much physical endurance and tenacity in the field and bravery in battle. Once he saved the life of Alcibiades by risking his own, and once again by his coolness he extricated his friend Laches and himself from considerable danger. All in all, he had in him the stuff of which great missionaries and martyrs are made, as circumstances were to prove so triumphantly in the end.

For all his strong-mindedness however, he was not in the least a recluse or an ascetic. He was tolerant of human life and enormously interested in it. He had a cockney affection for the city and the city streets and the going to and fro of men in the market-place and the colonnades, and he loved not only to observe but to mingle in all that went on about him. Indeed he never left Athens except for military expeditions and one visit to the Isthmian Games. Trips to the country had no attraction for him. He had, he said, nothing to learn from mere landscape with birds and trees but everything from watching and conversing with his fellow-men.

There was, then, nothing grim or priggish or puritanical about him, or, one had almost said in spite of his teaching and influence, nothing of the moral reformer. His vision was too wide and his heart too great to permit of his sympathizing with

the fanaticism, narrow-mindedness, and ignorance of human nature that characterize so many modern would-be redeemers of society. We may ask, rather, whether they would not have been just the first to be shamed by his charity and pulled to pieces and made fools of by his irony and his remorseless questioning. Certainly his manner towards his fellow-beings was very different from theirs. He was never shocked, even when he disapproved. He never held up his hands in horror and never drew aside his skirts. He never affected a superior virtue or wisdom, or belittled the minds and morals of those who disagreed with him. He merely questioned them gently and relentlessly and sought to make them in the end confute themselves.

His view, too, of the good things of life was mellow and enlightened. The pleasures of the world and the flesh were not for him inherently those of the devil—evil, suspect, and to be suppressed. On the contrary they were naturally good, to be welcomed and enjoyed, though not abused. Temperance in all things, not prohibition, was to his mind the rule of proper living. To these pleasures, of which he was always ready to take his share, he contributed not a little in return. He was genial, brilliant, gay, witty, a great talker, always kindly if sometimes sarcastic, and a famous diner-out. The strongest heads in Athens were no match for him, and he could with perfect sobriety drink everybody else under the table and have not so much as a bad taste in his mouth the next morning. Plato in the *Symposium* has immortalized one dinner-party at which Socrates, who had discoursed at length about love during the evening, was found at cock-crow still talking, though on a new subject, to the two sole survivors, his host Agathon and the poet Aristophanes, and drinking with them “out of a large goblet which they passed around. . . . And first of all Aristophanes dropped, and then, when the day was already dawning, Agathon. Socrates when he had put them to sleep, rose to depart. . . . At the Lyceum he took a bath and passed the day as usual; and when evening came, he retired to rest at his own home.”<sup>2</sup> Yet from behind this jovial, companionable and

<sup>2</sup> 223 C ff.



very human mask there shone forth the steady radiance of a mystical inner life, lived ever in the presence of the Gods.

Just how much of a philosophical education Socrates really had, and to what extent he was conversant with the older systems, are matters of some uncertainty. According to the ancients he was a pupil of both Anaxagoras and Archelaus, had talked with Parmenides and Zeno, and had a first hand acquaintance with the teachings of the Pythagoreans, Heracleitus, Empedocles, and the Atomists. This attribution of so wide-spread and profound a knowledge has, however, appeared suspicious to some modern critics, who have gone to the other extreme and minimized his debt to his predecessors.<sup>3</sup> But their critical attitude, again, has been questioned only lately in the light of a re-examination of the evidence, and an attempt has been made to justify and reinstate the opinion of the ancients as on the whole authoritative. Socrates, it is now maintained, actually did have a very considerable and thorough acquaintance with the achievements of the mathematics and philosophy of his time. He was really a pupil of Archelaus, though not of Anaxagoras himself, and he was particularly stirred and influenced by the Orphics, the Pythagoreans, and Zeno.<sup>4</sup> To their influences we must add the natural piety and mysticism of his temperament, which predisposed him to an unquestioning belief in an overruling Providence and in the immortality and transmigration of the soul, and prejudiced him against both the metaphysical theories of his predecessors and the skepticism of the Sophists. He had, he tells us, eagerly sought a solution of his perplexities in the hypotheses of the older philosophers. But he had found that instead of sharing his inclination to see "sermons in stones and good in everything" they had shown a lamentable disposition to have "recourse to air, and ether, and water, and other eccentricities," and to attribute the structure and behavior of the world to physical and mechanical causes rather than to a divine purpose ordering all things for the best. And this had set him to thinking on his own account.<sup>5</sup>

By the time that he was twenty-five, it would seem, Socrates

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 52 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 132 *et seq.* Taylor, *Varia Socratica*, I, pp. 162 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Plato *Phaedo*, 96 A-99 E. Xenophon, *Mem.*, I, 1, 11 ff.; 4, § 5 ff.



had broken his leading-strings and begun to develop his own system. He was already well known in Athens, and perhaps had even then become a frequenter of Aspasia's "at homes" and an intimate of the Periclean circle.<sup>6</sup> And he had attracted the notice and favorable comment of the venerable Parmenides. Doubtless, too, he had made good progress with the famous "Socratic method" of extorting a common truth from the loose and contradictory statements of different individuals. He was already laying hold of everyone he met, pinning him down to his words, racking his brains with a merciless and prolonged inquisition into his real meaning, and drawing and quartering his increasingly confused and gasping definitions with an ever more minute and painful dissection. We may thus carry back the characteristic image of Socrates to those early days, and fancy an ugly, pop-eyed, snub-nosed youth waddling awkwardly about the streets, trailing after him a crowd of young admirers who hung upon his every word as he chaffed and bantered with them or buttonholed and engaged in lofty conversation some self-important citizen, turning him to their great delight upside down and inside out with question and cross-examination. Nor can it have been very much later that he began to gather about himself that small inner circle—united to him, it has recently been argued, not only by affection but by a common membership in some sort of philosophic "school" or secret Orphic-Pythagorean cult<sup>7</sup>—many of whom remained faithful unto death.

In the course of the thirty odd years that it was gathered about him this crowd of friends and admirers numbered sooner or later many of the most important and famous men of the day. There were the brilliant and charming, but profligate and untrustworthy Alcibiades, and Critias, later the moving spirit of the oligarchic usurpation of the Thirty Tyrants. To them we shall have occasion to refer later. There was the beautiful Charmides, an uncle of Plato's, who later was to introduce his young nephew to Socrates. And among the more intimate disciples "who clung to him, not to excel in the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 17 ff.

rhetoric of the Assembly and the Law-Courts, but with the nobler ambition of attaining to such beauty and goodness of soul as would enable them to discharge the various duties of life,"<sup>8</sup> were the devoted and enthusiastic Chaerophon, the Pythagoreans Simmias and Cebes from Thebes, the Eleatic Euclid from Megara, Xenophon, the leader of the Anabasis, and possibly the youthful Plato himself.<sup>9</sup> Of these some were with him when he died.

Before Socrates was thirty-five a curious event had occurred that crystallized his thoughts into a definite sense of divine mission and placed the direction of his life in higher hands. The admiring and impulsive Chaerophon had gone so far as to inquire of the Oracle at Delphi whether there were any man wiser than Socrates, and the Oracle with its accustomed tact, and perhaps not without a gentle malice which Socrates thought he detected in its answer, had replied that there was not. This answer set Socrates wondering. He felt that he possessed no wisdom small or great, and yet Apollo was a God and could not lie, for that would be contrary to a divine nature. The only way to test the oracle was to try to find a wiser man. So Socrates set forth on his search. First he addressed himself to a politician with a reputation for wisdom, but on questioning him he came to the conclusion that the great man was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and wiser still by himself. And he went away feeling that although neither of them knew anything really beautiful and good, still he was after all the better off of the two, for the politician knew nothing but thought that he knew, whereas he neither knew nor fancied that he did. This suspicion became stronger as he went from one man to another in all walks of life from pretentious philosophers and poets to humble artisans. "Even the good artisans," he found, "fell into the same error as the poets:—because they were good workmen they thought also that they knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom."

<sup>8</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, I, 2, 48 (trans. Dakyns).

<sup>9</sup> Cf., however, Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 209, who doubts whether Plato may be included among the more intimate disciples.

In the end, then, Socrates saw that the God was right, and guessed the meaning of his oracle. The truth was that God only was wise, and that the wisdom of men was of no account. Apollo did not mean to exalt him above others, but was merely using his name as an illustration, as if he said, "He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing." Moreover, it came to him that he had been raised up to preach the word of the God and vindicate his oracle to all men. His search for one wiser than he was by no means finished; it was only just begun. He was to go on his way obedient to the God, making inquiry into the wisdom of anyone, whether citizen or stranger, who appeared to be wise, and wherever he found ignorance he was to expose it and thus prove the truth of Apollo's utterance. But, he felt, he was not to leave men in the ignorance to which he had reduced them. The same process of question and cross-examination as stripped them bare of everything that was pretentious and inexact would also betray the common form and mould in which their thoughts were really cast. And, by revealing the essential agreement in meaning hidden beneath the loose, unconsidered use of words and ideas, this procedure might also lead to certain generally accepted definitions in matters of consequence to human life as the foundation of a rational theory of conduct.

Socrates foresaw the difficulties and dangers of the path—the poverty, the neglect of worldly affairs, the antagonism to the political and social life of his city, the enmity of his fellow-citizens to which he would be condemned. He was conscious of the dislike that the first steps of his search had provoked and he lamented and feared it. But a divine charge had been laid upon him from which there was no escaping. A cup had been held to his lips, which it was for the God and not for him to suffer to pass from him.<sup>10</sup>

From this time on, Socrates felt himself to be the Apostle of Apollo to the Athenians. The ubiquitous buttonholing and the subtle and relentless questioning and cross-examinations with which he persecuted his fellow-citizens and made a nui-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Plato, *Apology*, 21 ff. (Phrases from Jowett's translation have been freely used without quotation.)



sance of himself to high and low alike, became a solemn duty imposed upon him from on high, and were sustained and intensified by a mystical sense of divine favor and support. This earnestness naturally rendered his methods even more irritating, if anything, to those about him; and at a time, moreover, when misfortune was setting the Athenian nerves on edge. In his younger days, when Athens was at the heyday of her splendor and power, and his persiflage was less obviously actuated by a moral purpose, his sallies might perhaps seem even to those who suffered from them one more sparkle in the brilliance of the Periclean age. But the period of his maturity, his evangelism, and his greatest obnoxiousness fell within the long-drawn-out agony of the Athenian Empire and the era of political disorder that aggravated the years just before and after the humiliating end of the Peloponnesian War. Even in the earlier days of his mission some of his friends perhaps felt that he was going too far; and the poet Aristophanes—whom Socrates put to bed after the famous dinner-party at Agathon's—brought out a play, *The Clouds*, in which he ridiculed without mercy him, his set, and their doctrines.

Again, his calling, besides settling him like a troublesome gadfly on the Athenian people at a time when they were not in the best mood to be stung, also aroused a more serious resentment. Although he not only insisted on the necessity and naturalness of social and political organization and held the highest ideal of the function of the state and of the education indispensable to citizenship, but also himself set an example of obedience to law, he was unreservedly anti-democratic and would have nothing to do with the existing form of government. As an excuse for his non-participation in public affairs he pleaded that his mission left him no time for politics. And in truth the multifarious activities of Athenian citizenship afforded little leisure for other continuous work. But in the compact and tiny Greek states, which in comparison with modern nations were mere towns with their suburbs, such negligence could not but appear monstrous, nor could it fail to offend the deepest sensibilities of a race in whose sight political organization was the very law and order of the universe itself.



Socrates, then, to the eyes of his fellow-Athenians seemed totally lacking in public spirit and got the name of an undesirable citizen.

If his preaching had been merely mystical and unworldly, this abstinence would not have been so marked and so insulting. But, as it was, his mission brought him into collision with the established order at every step. He had no mercy on the institutions of government under which he lived or on the laws that he so loyally obeyed, and he never refrained from ridiculing and showing up the foibles and vices of the rule of the people. We have already had occasion to note some of his criticisms of the theory that all men are innately and equally fitted to govern and that no very special or profound education is needed to make a statesman. And if we are to credit him with the opinions put into his mouth by Plato in the *Republic*, he thought that the direction of public affairs should be removed from the control of the people altogether and placed in the hands of a governing class sifted out from the crowd by long training and severe tests in political ability and wisdom.

These views, although they were really as hostile to plutocracy and mere aristocracy of birth as they were to democracy, were naturally most offensive to the régime that happened to be in the saddle. They wounded the conceit of the masses, who fancied democracy to be intrinsically superior to any other form of government and who fell into the vulgar error of confusing the Athenian state with the Athenian constitution drawn up by Cleisthenes. To criticize that constitution was to run down one's country. To suggest that any form of government was better than the rule of the people was to attack sacred Athenian ideals. To propose to do away with democracy was a treasonable attempt to undermine Athenian institutions. And even to hold it up to ridicule was unpatriotic. No wonder, then, that Socrates seemed to go from bad to worse. Not only was he lacking in public spirit; he was a bad Athenian, and his teaching was calculated to unsettle the patriotism and subvert the "constructive citizenship" of the young men who flocked about him.

Worse still, some of his intimates seemed to have gone very

much to the bad under his influence. Was he not the bosom-friend of the dissolute and shifty Alcibiades, that "Alexander in the wrong place," as he has been called,<sup>11</sup> evil genius of the fatal Sicilian expedition which led to the downfall of Athens, political turn-coat and hatcher of oligarchic conspiracies, and a suspected ringleader in that most blasphemous affair of the mutilation of the statues of Hermes erected to the God of the ways at the street corners, as an act of piety, to bless and guard the city? Had he not had for an admirer, Critias, that renegade democrat, who had deserted his party in the hour of humiliation and need to become chief of the Thirty Tyrants and preside over the year's reign of terror, supported by foreign spears, that followed the surrender of Athens to the Spartans? And even though he had quietly defied certain orders of the Thirty that he considered illegal, just as he had tried to block the lawless procedure of the people after Arginusae, had he not quite calmly gone his way about the streets as if they were not running red with the best blood of the proscribed and massacred democrats? When, then, the democracy was reinstated in Athens in September of 404 B. C., it was in no temper to endure much longer being put through its intellectual paces and made to turn moral and logical somersaults for the amusement of the young, at the crack of the whip of this tiresome and terrible old man.

It is doubtful, nevertheless, whether even the really serious dislike and distrust excited by Socrates' political opinions and behavior were in themselves sufficient to account for the crisis that was now fast approaching. In any case the amnesty granted to all but a few of the most prominent oligarchs would have shielded him from charges based on political grounds. But he had also run foul of the religious bigotry of his fellow-citizens. He might be forgiven his "voice" and his trances. They were at the worst a visitation from the Gods and entitled him, if anything, to respect.<sup>12</sup> But he was associated in the minds of the people with the emotional, theatrical, protestant Orphic movement, which was fast degenerating into all sorts

<sup>11</sup> Holm, *op. cit.* (Eng. Trans.), II, p. 401.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 184. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 ff.

of sensationalism and superstition. He was known to hold curious, non-conformist beliefs on the immortality and transmigration of the soul, and perhaps in his youth he had been actually initiated into the Mysteries.<sup>13</sup> It might even be, though this point is in dispute, that he himself was the centre of some Orphic-Pythagorean cult and teaching with strange foreign affiliations at Megara and elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> And, if this were so, who knew what such a secret brotherhood, international in its scope and character, might be up to? Even if it plotted no treason and threatened no direct danger to the state, the cosmopolitan nature, foreign character, and secret rites of this Pythagorean "free-masonry" were contrary to true Athenianism and the national spirit of the Established Church.

Furthermore, there was some ground for supposing that Socrates' eccentric piety might conceal a really blasphemous attitude towards the national cult. The long standing scandal of the mutilation of the hermae, which had so upset Athens sixteen years before, had not yet faded from men's minds. And there had also been stories, no less shocking to Athenian piety, of the Eleusinian Mysteries being parodied and profaned in private houses. To be sure, the authorities had been baffled. The perpetrators had never been discovered, and those who had been arrested, like Alcibiades for example, had been acquitted for want of evidence. But it had been suspected at the time who the ringleaders of the sacrilege were, and among them were counted Socrates' most intimate friends. The incidents had never been forgotten, but still smouldered and kept flaring up from time to time. And whenever people thought of them they remembered that Socrates had been in some way mixed up with the matter.

All in all, then, Socrates had come to impress people as a very disagreeable and undesirable person whom it would be to the public comfort to detach from the Athenian elders and to the public interest to remove from the midst of the Athenian youth. Four years after the return of the democracy the storm broke. In 399 B. C. he was formally accused of worship-

<sup>13</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 ff., p. 174.



ping not the Gods of the state, but strange divinities, and of corrupting the young by his teachings. Behind these charges there lurked, as we have seen, a life-time's accumulation of resentment at his methods, suspicion engendered by his religious beliefs and practices, and very real alarm at the apparent effect of his anti-democratic, un-Athenian views and teachings. To this, rather than to the face value of the indictment, his condemnation by a considerable majority was due. His accusers had proposed the death-penalty, but according to Athenian law Socrates had the right to suggest an alternative sentence, and had he asked for exile or imprisonment, or even the imposition of a fine sufficient to suit his offence to public opinion, his option would doubtless have been accepted. But it was the last straw laid upon his judges' patience when he proposed that, if he were to get what he deserved, he should be maintained at the public expense like the winner of a chariot-race at Olympia. The most he could afford to pay himself, he said, was one mina—an absurdly small sum—but his friends had offered to advance thirty if the court would accept that. The court promptly condemned him to death.

The sentence, however, was not carried out for thirty days because the ship that the Athenians sent each year to the festival of Apollo at Delos had been prepared for departure on the day before the trial, and during its absence the city might not be polluted by the execution of those under sentence of death. In the course of the month Socrates might have escaped without difficulty, and was urged to do so by his friends. But he refused to take advantage of their offers of help, saying that the law must be respected and that it would be wrong for him to disobey it. The ship returned from Delos of an evening, and the next morning his friends came to the prison very early, for they knew he had to die. He spent the day discoursing with them on the immortality of the soul, and bade them be of good cheer since no man who had adorned his soul "in her own proper jewels, which are temperance, and justice, and courage, and nobility, and truth," had anything to fear from death. And towards evening he bathed and said farewell to his wife and children. At sunset he asked that the hemlock be brought him,



and drank it. "And," says Phaedo, in whose person Plato describes Socrates' last moments, "hitherto most of us had been able to control our sorrow; but now when we saw him drinking, and saw, too, that he had finished the draught, we could no longer forbear, and in spite of myself my own tears were flowing fast; so that I covered my face and wept over myself, for certainly I was not weeping over him, but at the thought of my own calamity in having lost such a companion. Nor was I the first, for Crito, when he found himself unable to restrain his tears, had got up and moved away, and I followed; and at that moment, Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time, broke into a loud cry which made cowards of us all. Socrates alone retained his calmness. What is this strange outcry, he said. I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not offend in this way, for I have heard that a man should die in peace. Be quiet, then, and have patience. When we heard that, we were ashamed and refrained from our tears; and he walked about until, as he said, his legs began to fail, and then he lay on his back, according to directions, and the man who gave him the poison now and then looked at his feet and legs; and after a while he pressed his foot hard and asked him if he could feel; and he said, No; and then his leg, and so upwards and upwards, and showed us that he was cold and stiff. And he felt them himself, and said: When the poison reaches the heart, that will be the end. He was beginning to grow cold about the groin, when he uncovered his face, for he had covered himself up, and said (they were his last words)—he said: Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt? The debt shall be paid, said Crito; is there anything else? There was no answer to his question; but in a minute or two a movement was heard, and the attendants uncovered him; his eyes were set, and Crito closed his eyes and mouth.

"Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend, whom I may truly call the wisest, and justest, and best of men whom I have ever known."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 117 C ff.

## II

We have already noted the point at which Socrates broke with his predecessors and contemporaries. As the various aspects of the universe, like consciousness and life, and matter and motion, and moral and natural law had been gradually disentangled from one another, there had been a growing tendency, which was on the point of culminating in Democritus, to conceive Reality in what we should to-day call purely "physical" terms. The world-stuff at the touch of Empedocles and Anaxagoras had already turned to cold and lifeless matter, and the world-process was fast on its way to becoming a wholly mechanical and purposeless operation actuated, not by a divine Providence, but by blind necessity. Mind had been segregated from the other elements of the All, not as a permanently dominant and governing principle, but as one among many substances whose superior activity was limited to merely setting the others in motion and then leaving them to their fate. And even this doubtful privilege was about to be taken from it by Democritus, and its only title to superiority was to consist in the special fineness of its atoms.

Moreover, the mind's reputation for veracity in observing and recording what went on had long been under a cloud. That the senses were out-and-out liars had been well known since the days of the Eleatics. And Parmenides' optimistic view that reason had an independent peep-hole on Reality, which enabled the intellect to see through the deceptions of the senses and know the truth, had not been altogether confirmed by the experience of Empedocles and Anaxagoras, who had complained not a little of the difficulties that they encountered in discovering the nature of things. Finally, Protagoras had come along and denied explicitly that any such knowledge was possible. Reason had no private access to Reality and no inside information about truth. It was dependent upon the senses for all it knew, and therefore all it knew was lies. Truth itself was nothing but a certain plausibility in one's sensations, a certain sense of things *seeming* to be true. And since there were as many "seemings" as there were individual sets of sense-

organs, there were as many truths as there were perceiving minds.

Now, with most of this Socrates found himself unable to agree. His innate piety balked at an irreligious interpretation of the universe. The evidence of design, as he thought, in everything was in itself sufficient to refute a mechanical and materialistic view. When one examined, for example, the body of man and saw how admirably adapted all its contrivances were to the discharge of their functions and the fulfilment of their purposes, could one any longer doubt whether things “constructed with such foresight” were products of chance or of intelligence? Must they not, indeed, seem “the handiwork of some wise artificer, full of love for all things living?”<sup>16</sup> Again, was it not obvious what tender pains the Gods had taken to furnish man with all he needed? Had they not supplied him with light by day and by night, with food and water and fire, with recurrent seasons and moderate climate, with domestic animals, and with the reason, memory, and imagination necessary to utilize all these gifts in the service of society and civilization?<sup>17</sup> It seemed plain to Socrates that all these things could be explained only on the supposition that the world was designed and governed by a divine power for the greatest good of all concerned.

Socrates, then, came out from his studies as disdainful as Protagoras and Gorgias of the value of philosophic hypotheses regarding the nature of the universe. But the causes of his dissatisfaction and contempt were not the intellectual reasons of the agnostic Sophists. They were to be found rather in the bias of the believing skeptic whose mind is made up beforehand to doubt all theories that conflict with his faith, and to regard as vain and demoralizing any speculation that might lead to an irreligious conclusion. But the practical result—the disparagement of pure science and of philosophical research and achievement—was the same in both cases. Indeed, the skepticism of Socrates was far more deadly. Protagoras and Gorgias had at least left an open field levelled for free and

<sup>16</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, I, iv, 5-6 (trans. Dakyns, pp. 26, 27).

<sup>17</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, IV, 3, §§ 3-12.



unprejudiced reconstruction. Socrates littered it with ethics and piety, the doctrine that the purpose of a thing explains its existence, and the sentiment that the most morally edifying account of the creation and disposition of the world must necessarily be the truest. He thus laid the foundations, capped by Plato and Aristotle, of an obstructive predilection for attributing the existence, structure, and movements of the universe to moral considerations and ends—a favoritism that stood in the way of the free development of science and philosophy for nearly two thousand years, and whose ghost still haunts us five centuries after our liberation by the Renaissance from its living presence.

But if Socrates believed implicitly in a providential direction of the world and set his face against the mechanistic tendencies of philosophy, he felt no less strongly that the mind could be no mere stuff akin, in all save its greater liveliness and function of thought, to the other material elements. The immortality of the soul was another article of faith for him. To say just how far he had developed ideas on this subject brings us somewhat prematurely to the vexed question of the extent to which Plato puts his own arguments into Socrates' mouth.<sup>18</sup> If, however, we may credit Socrates as well as Plato with the views set forth in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*,<sup>19</sup> he supported his belief with an elaborate argument and accepted the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine that the soul is an immaterial essence akin to the Gods and in every way opposed to the gross bodily substances within which she is temporarily imprisoned. For our purpose, however, it will be more convenient not to take up these arguments until we come to discuss Plato.

Again, Socrates rejected the Protagorean skepticism regarding the powers of the mind. The speculations of his predecessors had been futile enough, to be sure. But that was not because the mind was born blind, but because it refused to open its eyes to the evidences of the providential government of the world and the divine destiny of the soul. Here, once more, the extent to which Socrates indulged in speculations of his own

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>19</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 153, 154, 191. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 17 ff.



is a mooted point. It has been customary to represent him as content simply to avert his gaze from the disappointing results of scientific inquiry and let it rest on the design and purpose in things, without scrutinizing further the nature of the universe. Even his theology, it has been said, was an appendix to his ethics.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the still more modern view to which we have just alluded, while granting his loss of interest in science and his preoccupation with the problem of the good, finds that in dealing with this problem as well as with that of immortality he fell back upon Pythagorean speculations and developed a considerable "metaphysical" system.<sup>21</sup> We shall do well then first to take up the Socratic teaching within the limits commonly assigned to it, and then to note the extensions suggested by some of the latest critics. ✓

However much or little Socrates may have sympathized with Pythagoras' attack upon the possibility of knowing the world-ground, it is certain that he had no patience with the doctrine that the individual man is the measure of all things and that, even touching human ideals, institutions, and behavior, knowledge can reach no sure foundations of reality and authority beneath the shifting quicksands of different particular opinions. The interest and aim of his philosophy was just to show that if you go about it in the right way you can discover certain common and abiding features behind the apparent flux and relativity of moral standards and laws. These features are the same in all men at all times and places, and from them universally valid rules of conduct can be deduced.

For his method of procedure in running universal right and wrong to earth Socrates was perhaps indebted to Zeno. The latter, we may remember, had used, if he had not invented, the device of "dialectic," or arguing by a sort of running, give-and-take discussion. Instead of directly defending or urging your own view, you did so by innuendo. You assumed for the moment the truth of your adversary's opinions, and then showed by analyzing his definitions and ideas that certain absurdities and contradictions would exist if he were right. The suggestion

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-117.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 154 ff. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-181, p. 266.

was, of course, that since the opposite hypothesis proved to be untenable your own position must be correct. In Socrates' hands the dialectical method became a regular dialogue. You buttonholed your opponent and put a question to him. He answered, and, taking firmer hold of him, you asked just what you were to understand by his use of such and such a phrase or word. He naturally would try to explain himself, but you once more, with even tighter grip, would pick his reply to pieces and demand from him a further and clearer definition of his meaning. Each new answer on his part would be met by new analysis and new inquiry on yours, and so step by step you would back him up against a wall.

Take for example the investigation of the nature of "justice," attributed by Plato to Socrates in the first book of the *Republic*. What do we mean by the term? Is it "to tell the truth and pay one's debts," as the poet Simonides had said? But surely that is not always just. It is sometimes right to lie, and it would be very wrong to hand back his dagger to a madman. A better suggestion perhaps is that "justice" consists in doing good to our friends and harm to our enemies. But we must first distinguish between our real and our apparent friends, and our real and apparent foes. Shall we say that our true friends are the good, and our true enemies the bad? But in that case it will be just to make the bad even worse off than they are—which is absurd. Plainly we have been following a false scent.

Suppose, however, some Thrasymachus bursts into the dialogue at this point with the assertion that "justice is the interest of the stronger." But what does he mean by "stronger"? And what if the "stronger" mistake their own interest? Is it then just to obey them? Again, what is the interest of the stronger at any rate? The interest of the good physician is the health and welfare of his patients, of the good shepherd to feed and tend his sheep. The interest of the successful ruler, then, would seem to be not his private good but the good of the whole state. And, Socrates adds maliciously, this is borne out by the fact that we have to pay our politicians salaries to induce them to undertake the task of ruling us, whereas, if

Thrasymachus were right, the prospect of "graft" should be sufficient incentive. If, then, our first line of definitions lands us in an absurdity, our second leaves us in a self-contradiction. We must try again.

Now if everybody could only be backed towards a wall in this way, all, Socrates thought, would be seen converging upon the same point. Put any number of men chosen at random through a similar inquisition regarding the nature of justice, and, if the racking were severe and thorough enough, they would without exception confess to an identical definition in the end. The use of logic and argument, Protagoras to the contrary notwithstanding, could really extract from the confusion and antagonism of individual "truths" about justice a common and authoritative truth which all could be brought to see and accept. Moreover, the whole vocabulary of daily human life was in precisely the same case. Hidden behind its apparent looseness and disorder a real order was to be found. Deep down in every mind, buried under a litter of superficial and careless definition and ignorant prejudice, there lay the same fundamental notions of justice and temperance and friendship and courage and of all the other basic qualities and relations of human life. Right and wrong, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, seemed purely conventional and relative to time, place, and the individual, only because men did not stop to examine and analyze their ideas and to define clearly exactly what was in their minds when they talked and argued among themselves.

The procedure employed by Socrates was really an application to various moral and social problems of what we should to-day call the "inductive" method. This method is particularly associated by us with the name of John Stuart Mill, who in the middle of the last century analyzed and developed it at length in his *Logic* with reference to its bearing upon the nature of scientific investigation and proof. Its essence is a rigorous cross-examination and comparison of particular data with a view to extracting their common or "universal" qualities, and Mill develops at length the rules and safeguards necessary for an exact sifting of evidence and for proper inferences from it.



Our so-called "natural laws" and our scientific hypotheses are constructed by pushing the world to the wall in very much the same way that Socrates pushed his fellow-citizens. But, whereas Socrates confined himself to ethics and carried on a series of somewhat disjointed investigations, science and philosophy today apply his method universally and seek to reach definitions and general concepts that will cover and unite all the aspects of the universe.

In order to employ the inductive method in the sphere in which he was specially interested and to enter into wisdom and virtue, Socrates felt that one must needs take to heart the celebrated inscription on the temple of Apollo at Delphi, "Know thyself," which he adopted as the motto, so to speak, of his philosophy. For the first step in knowing oneself was to perceive how superficial and ignorant and prejudiced one really was. No man could even begin to be truly wise until it had been driven home to him how little he really bothered to be clear and straightforward with himself, or to think things out and discover the true significance of the phrases that he used with such an air of assurance and self-righteousness. But, when the preliminary stage of humble realization and confession of ignorance was passed, the task of self-examination and self-knowledge would lead, little by little, to a vision of that universal and enduring human nature, the same in all men in all times and places, upon whose heart was engraved the final and authoritative meaning of those great words that different lips, from lack of education, mispronounced so differently.

Mindful of his mother's profession, and perhaps actuated unconsciously by the universal human inclination to employ sexual metaphors, Socrates used a figure drawn from obstetrics to help explain his method of discovering through self-examination the true meaning of one's words and thoughts. Every mind was, as it were, pregnant with these meanings, and the process by which they were discovered and brought to light might not inappropriately be called a veritable bringing of them to birth. Socrates' own part in the matter was that of a midwife. His business was to stimulate and assist other men to bring into the world the true definitions or notions of justice



and temperance and right and the like, which lay already fully formed in their minds awaiting delivery. The slow and painful thinking out of the real meaning of these terms was a succession of birth pangs, and the way in which he drove men to inquire into the significance of each new phrase, and kept confining them to more and more exact definition, was the spiritual counterpart of the means employed by a midwife to help labor to a successful issue.

Another turn was also given to the metaphor by Socrates. The conversation by which men were invited to question themselves and to reflect upon what they really meant, might, he felt, be also regarded as a kind of initial begetting of fundamental notions. Argument, for example, among a group of individuals about the nature of justice seemed to impregnate their minds with its true form and cause them to conceive its definition. In a word, these general forms or notions which he was always so busy helping bring to birth sprang from the intercourse of minds, just as physical offspring were produced by that of bodies. Moreover, just as physical attraction impelled to reproduction, so generation of the knowledge of true justice and right and virtue was the result of the love of one mind for another. Friends were naturally more predisposed than mere acquaintances or strangers to discuss together freely and passionately the deep problems of human life and happiness, and were therefore the natural progenitors of the most searching and the noblest answers. Indeed, it was the duty of friends not to allow their affection to lie idle and sterile. Their love for one another ought to drive them to converse about these profounder questions, and was fruitful only if it succeeded in creating in them a vision, shared in common, of what was truly beautiful and good.

The transference of these figures of speech to the relation between master and pupil and friend and friend came all the more naturally to Socrates, since among the Greeks romantic love was associated, not with the attraction between men and women, but with that between man and man. The Oriental seclusion in which women were kept in Greece and their lack of education prevented them from being the intellectual and

social companions of men, save in rare instances like that of Aspasia at whom everyone looked askance. There was little home life and society as we understand the terms. Social life for men was largely life away from home, or at any rate from the women's quarters, in the Assembly and the market-place, the baths and the colonnades, and whatever other substitutes the ancients may have had for the club and the café. And when one entertained one's friends at one's own house, the ladies of the household were always conspicuously absent. The world of the Greek, in short, was essentially a man's world, and it was to men rather than to women that he looked for his most intimate associations, for his natural companions, and for the friends to whom he gave himself most unreservedly and upon whom his deepest and most enduring affections were centred.<sup>22</sup>

The seclusion and inferior education and position of women were, however, not so much the cause as the occasion, or even, one might say, the effect of this disposition of Greek society. The sexual instinct would seem in its primitive form to be directed impartially towards individuals of both the same and opposite sex. This diffuseness, which frequently passes into a distinct predilection for members of the same sex, appears always to exist to some degree in all persons,<sup>23</sup> but it is more marked in some individuals and peoples than in others, and its intenser forms are frequently found among primitive tribes. The Greeks, it has been suggested, were descended from a stock of which it was a characteristic,<sup>24</sup> and they retained this predilection in so open and accented a form, partly, no doubt, because the social conditions fostered by it were so favorable to its persistence. Indeed, seeing that their women were from seclusion and lack of education incapable for the most part of arousing the finer feelings and responding to the higher demands based upon the sexual instinct, we may reasonably doubt whether, in the absence of this preference, physical attraction would not have remained sterile in the Greeks, with-

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Zimmern, *Greek Commonwealth*, pp. 337-338.

<sup>23</sup> James, *Psychology*, II, p. 439.

<sup>24</sup> G. Murray, *Rise of the Greek Epic*, p. 143. Zimmern, *op. cit.*, p. 338, note.

out fruition of those nobler aspects of passion that we call love, to the incalculable impoverishment of their life and genius. Be that as it may, as their civilization flowered they refined and expurgated their form of the sexual instinct, as we have ours, and built up an ideal of friendship in which the basic physical relation was as intermittent and subordinate as it was in the mediaeval worship of woman, or as it is in the modern cult of romantic love. Naturally, this ideal proved something of a counsel of perfection, and the more obvious lapses from it had to be deplored, as we to-day deplore the unruliness of the flesh and the importunity of unsublimated desire. The Thebans, indeed, sought to turn these passionate friendships to military uses and the service of the state, by forming their *corps d'élite* of lovers, on the theory that such would be shamed from the slightest act of cowardice and spurred on to emulate each other in deeds of heroic courage. Nor was their confidence misplaced, for after the battle of Chaeronea not one of the gallant band was found alive. Similarly, Socrates tried to enlist this affection in the service of philosophy and society and to employ it as an incentive to a noble and unselfish competition in acquiring knowledge and virtue.

If Socrates' great commandment was "Know Thyself," the principle that summed up for him all the law and the prophets, and upon which this commandment rested was that all virtue is knowledge. In the first place, it was obvious that in order to be just, pious, temperate, and courageous one had first to know what justice and temperance and courage really were. He, for example, "who knows what the law requires with respect to the gods will correctly be defined as a pious man,"<sup>25</sup> and "those who know the things which are lawful as concerning men"<sup>26</sup> will be rightly defined as just and upright. Or again, take wisdom and temperance. "Was a man able on the one hand to recognize things beautiful and good sufficiently to live in them? Had he, on the other hand, knowledge of the 'base and foul' so as to beware of them? If so, Socrates judged him to be wise at once and temperate."<sup>27</sup> Instinct, convention, the loose

<sup>25</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, IV, 6, § 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 9, 4 (trans. Dakyns).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, § 6.



and unconsidered opinions of the crowd on these subjects, would not do. Each man must think things out for himself, and not stop until he was sure that he had probed to the quick the good and the bad, the fair and the foul, and had a correct and certain knowledge of what was what. If he stopped short of a correct definition his conduct would be based upon ignorance or prejudice, and would not be wholly enlightened and truly virtuous.

But the principle, "virtue is knowledge," had also in Socrates' mind a more far-reaching and positive application. Man, he thought, naturally sought his own good and did what he believed to be to his best advantage. No one deliberately tried to harm himself or did wrong on purpose. We went wrong simply and solely because we either mistook or did not know the right way. It was ignorance that was the root of all evil. Remove ignorance, and right action would be spontaneous and instinctive. In a word, if only a man knew what was right, he would do what was right without further stimulus; if only he knew what was wrong, he would quite mechanically and surely avoid evil. Knowledge was more than a guide to virtuous activity. It also provided the driving power. It propelled as well as steered men on the right course.

Here, as has been often remarked, we put our finger on one of the weak spots of the Socratic ethics. Socrates failed to reckon with passion and impulse, which often drive us in the face of our better judgment to do deliberately what we know to be wrong and to our disadvantage. Seeing and approving the better, we follow the worse. Again, as Spinoza pointed out, passion can only be fought with passion. Knowledge in itself has no motive or even guiding power. We must have a steady and overwhelming *love* of truth and goodness that will blot out all other loves, if we are never to be seduced by the desires and pleasures of the moment. In a word, the Socratic theory is too intellectual and does not give sufficient weight to the part played by feeling and emotion in moral action.

But to return to our exposition. The doctrine that virtue is knowledge, besides affording in Socrates' opinion a working basis for conduct, also provided a principle of unity for all the virtues. Justice, for instance, was knowledge of proper action



towards men; piety, of proper action towards the Gods; courage, of proper action in the face of things really to be feared. The virtue, then, and the unity of these qualities lay in the common basis of correct knowledge which their definitions all implied. Everyone, young and old, men and women, rich and poor, tyrant and slave, was capable of this selfsame knowledge. There were not, therefore, separate and distinctive virtues of man and woman and the different stations of life, as Gorgias had maintained, since the principle of good conduct was the same in all. Virtue, although displayed in different ways and in all sorts and conditions of men, was one not many.

Finally, Socrates' definition of morality enabled him to deal to his own satisfaction with the interesting problem, of which the Sophists had made a burning issue, whether virtue was a natural endowment and function of mankind or an artificial and acquired convention, and whether it could or could not be instilled by teaching. This question Socrates answered in both senses. Virtue could be taught and acquired. Indeed, the end of education was to make men good. But the teaching of morals was not the instilling into the mind from without of an arbitrary convention foreign to its nature, as Protagoras and Gorgias had supposed. It was rather teaching the mind to know itself, to discover the disposition with which it was naturally endowed, and to attain a clear vision of the good which it was instinctively inclined to follow. The strength of this disposition and this vision, of course, like strength of body, might differ in different individuals. It was notorious "that people brought up under the same conditions differed greatly" in their morals. Nevertheless, Socrates felt that by learning and practice the natural aptitude towards virtue might always be strengthened. Indeed, it was a general principle that the "natural differences of one man from another might be compensated by artificial progress, the result of care and attention."<sup>28</sup>

He could not, however, rest in the definition that virtue is knowledge without further amplification of his meaning. For if he did, the question provoked by his own method was sure to

<sup>28</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, III, 9, § I *et seq.* (trans. Dakyns).

be on everybody's lips. Virtue is knowledge, yes, but knowledge of what? The ready and apparently simple retort was—why, knowledge of goodness, of course. Such an answer, however, was really too good to be true, and by its very redundancy of virtue fell into a vicious circle. For we should naturally ask next—but what is goodness? And we should naturally be told in reply that it was knowledge of virtue. But obviously to be told that morality is having a moral opinion about morals, and that morals consist in having a moral opinion about morality, would leave us just where we were at the beginning. We should only have revolved like a squirrel in its cage, and for all our pains we should find ourselves no nearer to knowing what goodness and virtue really were. The important thing was to know our reasons for counting justice, temperance, courage, and the like as virtues rather than vices. Why was it that the distinction between right and wrong existed at all? And why did we catalogue our behavior as we did, docketing this act among the rights rather than the wrongs, and that among the wrongs rather than the rights? What was the principle that separated good from evil? What was it that constituted the goodness of the good, and made the knowledge of it virtue?

In determining the answer that Socrates gave to this question we can no longer avoid the opposed interpretations of his views to which we alluded earlier in this chapter. If we accept the view of the more old-fashioned, more conservative, and perhaps more reliable modern critics, who see fact in the *Memorabilia* and fancy in the Platonic Dialogues and draw their picture from Xenophon and so much in Plato as does not go beyond and improve upon him, we shall regard the Socratic reply as modest in scope, middle-class in tone, and vaguely conceived at that. But more exciting though more questionable vistas are opened, if we follow some recent scholars who suspect Xenophon of having taken his information largely second-hand from Plato and of having sifted and colored it with the express purpose of refuting the charges against his master.<sup>29</sup> These critics find no difficulty in regarding Socrates as the author as well as the

<sup>29</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 147 ff.

mouthpiece of the substance of the *Phaedo* and *Symposium*, and in attributing to him "the whole theory of goodness expounded in Plato's earlier dialogues down to and including the *Meno*, and even, in substance, that set forth in the *Republic*."<sup>30</sup> Fortunately it is not incumbent upon us to rush in where others themselves tread gingerly.<sup>31</sup> We have only to outline the two views, and leave the question open.

To return, then, to the more conventional interpretation. Socrates, we are told, when it came to answering the all important question—what is this good the knowledge of which is virtue?—fell back for his reply upon the standards laid down by the Sophists. The good thing was the conventional thing—the thing hallowed by tradition and usage and crystallized by the law of the state. So far as "religion and the concerns of heaven" were in question, Xenophon tells us, Socrates' "behavior conformed . . . in conduct and language . . . to the rule laid down by the Pythia (at Delphi) in reply to the question 'How shall we act?' as touching a sacrifice or the worship of ancestors, or any similar point. Her answer is '*Act according to the law and custom of your State, if you will act piously.*'"<sup>32</sup> Similarly to act towards one's fellow beings according to the law and usage of one's state was to act rightly.<sup>33</sup> Justice, as we saw, he defined as the knowledge of "those things which are lawful concerning men." And we remember that he refused to escape from prison because he felt it morally wrong to disobey the laws of the city even though they had condemned an innocent man.<sup>34</sup>

Plainly, however, such a reply was only a makeshift and a half-answer. Some rational basis had to be found for the authority of law and custom and for the existence of this usage and statute rather than that. Otherwise one would be drifting dangerously near to the doctrine of Thrasymachus that right and justice were arbitrary and artificial principles, and that law and custom derived their existence from the selfish

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149–150.

<sup>32</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, I, 3, § 1. Cf. IV, 3 § 16 (trans. Dakyns).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 4, § 1 ff.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Plato, *Crito*. 50 A ff. Xen., *Mem.*, IV, 7, § 1.



interests of the stronger and drew their authority and majesty solely from the power of the governing class to enforce them.

This deeper, rational basis for morality was found by Socrates in the concept of utility. The good was what was useful and beneficial to man. The virtuousness of all the virtues consisted in their superior advantage in this respect over the vices. Justice was better than injustice because the obedience to law and order that it implied made the state more powerful and prosperous and the individual more secure and "more honoured at home and abroad."<sup>35</sup> Continence and temperance were more virtuous than intemperance and lack of self-control because by the impetuosity and haste of incontinence we were "cut off from the full fruition of the more obvious and constantly recurring pleasures." To self-control alone, thanks to the power it gave to wait till one was really hungry and in the best appetite and to stop when one had had enough, belonged "the power to give us any pleasure worth remembering."<sup>36</sup> The whole catalogue of the virtues could be run through and analyzed in a similar manner, and each would be found to confer a greater pleasure and benefit than could vice. Nay more, even a quality so apparently disinterested and untormented by morality as beauty could be reduced in every case to terms of appropriateness and service to a particular use."<sup>37</sup> The essence then of the beautiful and the good lay in utility, and virtue was knowledge of what was useful to human life.

At this point we seem merely to have returned, though by a safer and more reasoned road, to the Sophists' idea of virtue as worldly wisdom and success. Whether this is actually the case depends upon the meaning we give to the term "useful." For, in identifying the good with the useful, Socrates had by no means extricated himself from the vicious circle of definition by synonym or given any final meaning to the word "goodness." He had simply raised the deep and difficult question of defining utility, and had answered it by saying that the

<sup>35</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.*, IV, 4, § 13 ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 5, § 7 ff. (trans. Dakyns).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 6, § 9.





useful is that which is good for some good end or purpose. Here, at last, though we are still defining words in terms of one another, we catch sight of the crux of the moral problem. In order to decide what is really useful and good for the purposes of human life we must first determine what those purposes really are. This is the final and critical question, since the nature of our answer will depend upon and reveal once and for all our vision of the destiny of man and of the ends after which it is truly worth while for him to strive. What, then, was Socrates' view of the true aim of human life? What in his opinion was the use of being temperate and self-controlled and just? What was the good of being good?

The sense of the interpretation that we have been following is that at this point Socrates actually did falter and slip back to a position not unlike that of Protagoras and Gorgias. He found, indeed, that the Sophists had grounded human conduct on an insufficient, insecure, and shifting base, and for their jerry-built foundations he proposed to substitute bed-rock. But, after he had hewn a firm and tested substructure out of solid principle, he built upon it a house of life that was little higher than theirs and that was planned in much the same style. He did not get beyond a severely practical, middle-class, Philistine ideal of what was requisite and sufficient for a good life. Human existence, as he seems to have seen it, was aimed at nothing beyond virtuous, respectable, orderly living. The demand for a stable, upright, prosperous society exhausted the yearning after perfection, and since the prevalence of justice, temperance, self-control, and the like were equivalent to law and order, safety and content, a "full dinner pail," a radio, and a Ford, he identified these homely virtues with the sovereign good. Virtue was its own and sufficient justification and reward. To be a sound, practical, plain person who knew and did right was to have fulfilled the destiny and discharged the whole duty of man.

But to the Graces and the Muses, whose handmaidens the virtues are, Socrates did not raise his eyes. He took little interest in the things that ennoble and justify existence to the aristocratic, the educated, and the refined. The reaches of

experience disclosed to sensitiveness of perception, feeling, and thought, and the infinite shades of meaning with which life excites, intrigues, and half yields itself to those possessed of imagination and insight, were a closed, or at the most a half-cut, book to him. The wonder and beauty of the world, the tremendous and amazing spectacle of all time and existence, the pageant and drama of human history, and the surprise, the strange and sudden adventure, the comedy and the tragedy of each individual career, left him cold. The Sophists had been indifferent to the study of art and literature unless it could be turned to practical account; but Socrates was antagonistic to it unless it could be made to teach a moral lesson. Even the violet crown and the laurel wreath of his own Athens he would have deemed useless because they were not edible.

Yet for the Greek, as for every other people and age of high and enlightened civilization, the sovereign good of all human striving lay just in those further reaches, those subtler meanings, that fugitive wonder and beauty, to whose charm art, literature, and religion, and elegance and distinction of living are so impassioned a response. From this wider point of view the achievement of bare moral principle and upright living is not the end but the beginning of human progress. One may of course roof over the cellar of the house of life with self-satisfaction and inhabit it, if one chooses, living, propagating, and dying in all respectability, under ground. Righteousness and prosperity and social order and comfort can exist without taste or enlightenment or distinction. But the fact remains that the cellar is meant, not to house man, but to afford a firm foundation for a superstructure of humane and splendid civilization tending to the stars.

The reasons for the possible short-sightedness of Socrates' ethics are not far to seek. Perhaps it was in part a handicap of his bourgeois birth and early circumstances, aggravated by the increasingly "practical," "efficient" atmosphere of democracy in which his mature and later years were spent. But doubtless, also, it arose from his genuine alarm at the unstable foundations of conduct proposed by the Sophists, and from the consequent absorption of all his interest and attention in

the problem of discovering the basic principles and virtues without which the higher attainments of civilization, however brilliant, can have only a precarious and fitful existence. The engineering difficulties were so great that he could spare no time from their solution for working out the architecture of a moral order above ground. And on no account could he accept any suggestions tending to diminish the severity of his fundamental principles and break through the plain, stern surfaces of his moral masonry for the sake of a magic casement or two

“opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn,”

or even for the sake of a little more sunlight and a freer air.

So much for the first interpretation of the Socratic teaching. Let us now pass to the more vivid and interesting, though it may be less reliable, picture painted by those who draw their materials from a wider selection of the Platonic dialogues, including the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, and the *Republic*. As we have already pointed out, it is a portrait that credits Socrates with much wider speculation and a more profound conclusion. It depicts him as essentially a Pythagorean at whose hands both the mathematical and the mystical doctrines of the sect received a new fusion and a new application both moral and metaphysical.

In the first place, we are told, the Pythagorean doctrine of “Forms” illumined the whole Socratic method of discovering ultimate meanings and universal definitions. The Pythagoreans had said that things were really numbers, and had illustrated their theory by outlining different shapes, and then filling them in with a mosaic of units and counting the number it took to pack solidly each of the skeleton forms in question. And they had treated not only material objects but moral qualities and social institutions in this way, finding numbers even for marriage and for justice. We may note in passing that this theory, along with the Heracleitean doctrine of the Logos, had made important contributions to the growing distinction between “form” and “matter,” and to the question of the kind



of existence to be attributed to abstract things like laws and qualities.

Upon this teaching Socrates seized. It revealed to him the true end and the final limit of the search that he had undertaken. Class definitions or "universals," which could be discovered by comparing particular instances and sifting from them their common element, were not man-made notions. Far from being matters of individual opinion and chance agreement, their foundations lay even deeper than the common humanity that underlay different races and individuals. For that matter they transcended the sphere not only of things that exist "by convention" but even of those that exist "by nature." Their basis was, as it were, "supernatural." They were Pythagorean Forms imbedded in the very essence of Reality, and their existence in no wise depended upon the human mind. They were eternal and unchangeable, and would shine on undimmed and steady long after the passing rivulet of human life in which they were brokenly and vaguely reflected for the moment had dried up and disappeared. If the argument and cross-examination by which men discovered these pure essences might be called a begetting and bringing of them to birth, their seeming generation was in truth an incarnation and a nativity in which a Logos was made flesh.

Furthermore the Forms in which Socrates was interested were those of the virtues, and hence were of great and immediate moment to human life. The discovery and definition of them was a matter not merely of logical and scientific interest and satisfaction but of moral enthusiasm and happiness. Their dry white light was suffused with the eager, rosy glow of goodness. They were reflected in his mind not merely as ideas but also as ideals. They were, then, divinities as well as realities, and their dwelling place was most fitly described as with the Gods. This common element of perfection was itself a still higher Form—that of the pure and sovereign Good—which shone at the heart of every abstract virtue, just as courage and justice in the abstract shone at the heart of every just and courageous deed on earth. Thus at a stroke of the Pythagorean wand the common meanings of homely words were



transfigured into "higher realities," and the moral order, which had been overthrown and dragged down to earth for a moment by the Sophists, was re-enthroned at the centre of the universe.

But how was it that such august realities condescended to human life and could be known by man, victimized as he was by the deceptions of his senses and the deficiencies of his reason? It was no answer, according to the Pythagorean and metaphysical Socrates, to invoke the inductive method and say that reason extracted concepts from the comparison and cross-examination of particular instances presented to the senses. One could not, for example, simply assert that the existence and nature of justice in general was suggested by the occurrence in our experience of various data whose likeness to one another led to their being grouped under the same heading and called by the common name of "just." The problem was by no means so simple as that. In the first place, how could we be sure that these likenesses were more than accidental and that the group name was more than a mere convention and stood for a real quality, one and the same in all instances? Protagoras might be right. There were perhaps no universal principles and qualities at all. Just as there were as many truths, so there might be as many temperances, courages, beauties, and the like as there were individual opinions about them.

Moreover, the inductive method presupposed a natural ability on the part of the mind to compare things, to see their likenesses and differences, and to assign them to their proper groups. But this ability could not be taken for granted. Indeed, it constituted one of the central difficulties of the problem of knowledge. If, for example, a child at its first visit to the circus should take to naming correctly animals whose pictures, even, it had never seen, and should rapturously exclaim that the lion and tiger belonged to the same cat family as little pussy at home, we should consider him precocious and even uncanny. Yet the mind was behaving in just this unaccountable way. Apparently without any previous acquaintance with beauty and temperance and courage it recognized off-hand beautiful, temperate, and courageous things and acts when

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it met with them, and called them familiarly by their right names. Just, then, as we should feel that the precocious child must beforehand have seen the pictures and heard the names of the animals that he recognized, and have been told about the relationship of the lion to little pussy, so, we are told, the Pythagorean Socrates felt that our ability to compare experiences and say that one thing was like, or of the same class as another implied necessarily that the mind was in some way provided beforehand with a set of descriptions of the different forms to which our various experiences kept corresponding. Our feeling of similarity and our recognition that two or more objects belonged to the same class were just the pocketing of things by the special mould into which they fitted. Unless our reasons came already furnished with these different moulds in the shape of justice and temperance and courage, etc., for sifting and sorting experience, sense-data would roll about loosely and indiscriminately in the mind, and we should never perceive likeness or unlikeness, know one thing from another, or be able to classify objects at all. Instead, then, of general ideas and class-concepts being precipitated by reflection and reason from a comparison of particular objects, the power to extract the common qualities in things presupposed and depended upon a knowledge of these concepts existing full-fledged in the mind.

But, if the pure Forms of beauty, temperance, justice, and the like could neither be directly perceived by the senses nor built up indirectly by reason from reflection upon sense-data, how could the knowledge of them get into the mind? The answer to this question was found in the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine of immortality. Socrates, as we have already remarked, is represented in the *Phaedo*, and again in the *Republic*, as arguing that the soul is indestructible and as rejecting the view, inspired by the mathematical interests of the Pythagoreans and quite inconsistent with their religious tenets, that she is merely the harmony or attunement of the body. Having once established immortality to his own satisfaction, he could go on to say that in a previous existence the soul, herself akin to the divine, had beheld pure and perfect justice, temperance,

courage, and beauty face to face. And in her earthly life, although imprisoned in the dark tomb of the body and shut off from her former vision by the burden of the flesh, she still retained dim memories of those higher realities with which she had once consorted. Peering out from behind her prison bars through the opaque and narrow windows of sense, she caught familiar but puzzling gleams and reflections in the turbid flux of experience. They reminded her of something that she could no longer recall except confusedly, and aroused latent memories which struggled within her to regain and recollect their great originals. The reflections that evoked the same memory she felt to be similar. The gleams, for example, that stirred and half awakened her sleeping memory of eternal beauty she called beautiful, and those that unsealed her dim vision of absolute justice she called just. All so-called knowledge, then, was really only a recollection. When by comparison and cross-examination of data we arrived at a definition or extracted a universal principle or idea, we were inventing or discovering nothing new. We were merely reminiscing about some old, half-forgotten truth with which all men had been perfectly familiar before they were born. And the dialectical process of reasoning by which one proceeded from particular instances to the general rule, and from the concrete to the abstract, was in reality a process of escape from the prison of the body and the fetters of sense and passion into the realm of pure and eternal Form—a return of the soul towards the original and proper objects of her contemplation.

The doctrine of pre-existence and of conversance before birth with the pure Forms of things not only explained knowledge in Socrates' eyes; it also made clear to him the true origin and goal of all our affections and interests. The Forms, being perfect, were true and supreme goods, the natural objects of love and desire as well as of contemplation. So it was that the soul came into the body bringing with her memories that were also yearnings. These "first affections" were kindled, just as her "shadowy recollections" were stirred, by her contact with the world of sense, suggesting, as it did, in its blurred, inconstant way the glories she had known before birth. Love, then, like



knowledge, was a memory, a homing back of the soul to the scenes of her pre-natal existence. It was not really directed towards material and individual objects, which accidentally provoked it, but rather towards the perfect and eternal Forms or essences—pure and abstract justice, or temperance, or courage, for example,—whose steady light gleamed brokenly through their incomplete and fleeting embodiments in particular things. Nowhere was this more evident than in the soul's passion for beauty. She was forever falling in love with beautiful bodies, but her yearning, though it might be excited and fed by physical loveliness, could not find its true good and final satisfaction in the sensible world. Whatever the transports of possession might be, they left her balked of complete union with the object of her desire. From the beauty of the sunset and the arms of the beloved alike she came away weeping for that which they had brought so near but had just failed to give. Only when she had risen above the love of the body and the sensible world and had embraced the disembodied Form or essence of absolute beauty in itself, could the goal of all her striving be reached and the restless longing which had defied and thwarted every earthly love be stilled.

From this mystical, Pythagorean re-interpretation of Socrates' views we get a new light on his teaching that virtue is knowledge. The vicious circle of definition appears to be broken, and we seem to be in a position to give an authoritative definition of goodness and utility. This definition absolves him from the accusation of having fallen back upon the Sophists' doctrine of expediency and material success as the means and end of life, though it leaves him open perhaps to the charge of taking too unworldly a view of the world. If the soul has a divine origin and destiny, and her earthly life is a lapse from her high estate into poverty and disgrace, obviously her true interest will lie in regaining her birthright and fitting herself for a supernatural career, and to this end all her energies should be bent. The world and the body can give her nothing—except the physical foothold necessary in this life for keeping her head above the clouds. At the best, the ties in which they imprison her need not interfere with the pur-



suit of salvation ; at the worst, they bind her down beyond hope of rising.

The useful and the advantageous, then, in the knowledge of which virtue consists, has nothing to do with external conditions like worldly success and prosperity. Nor has it anything to do with the development and self-realization of the "natural man." Virtue is rather knowing how to cultivate an inward disposition of the soul that shall keep the soul independent of earthly surroundings and in touch with heavenly things. This disposition, which is the end and the essence of right doing, is dependent upon a condition of harmony and proportion akin to the balance and attunement that in the Pythagoreans' theory of medicine constituted the health of the body and in their metaphysics made up the essence of the soul herself.

In Socrates' application in the *Republic* of this harmony both the individual and the state are divided into three parts. In the individual there are reason, temper or spirit, and desire, and corresponding to them are the rulers who govern the body politic, the military forces which protect it, and the artisans who carry on its economic processes. In a virtuous, or, to use the Socratic term, a "just" man, as in a well-ordered state, the activities and desires that carry on the economy of his body will be obedient to the dictates of reason, or in other words, temperate. The heart and spirit which animate and preserve him will always be really courageous ; that is, guided and controlled by a rational estimate of what is truly to be feared and avoided. And finally, if he be truly virtuous and wise, reason will hand down no commands save those inspired by its proper function of knowing the real essences of things and the true and sovereign good.

If, then, this new picture of Socrates be correct, the Pythagorean teaching that things are essentially numbers or Forms and the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine of the fall and transmigration of the soul dispelled the doubt and the disappointment aroused in him by the mechanical and materialistic views of people like Anaxagoras, and by the skepticism of the Sophists. He now saw that Reality was immaterial and that, apart from the Forms or essences that they embodied and

exemplified, concrete objects, for all their seeming robustness and solidity, would collapse into a spineless, nameless, indistinguishable flux and chaos. He saw, also, how truth and goodness were not multiple and dependent upon the whim of the individual, but were universal, self-subsistent, and eternal, and hence how knowledge was possible and morality authoritative.

But by this time he would have become quite as inextricably involved as any of his predecessors or contemporaries in the old difficulty of reconciling appearances with the real situation as he conceived it. The Milesians, as we have seen, had raised the problem by their simple assumption that a single, homogeneous world-substance could actually be a thousand things which it obviously was not, and vice versa. The Eleatics had drawn the conclusion that, since Reality was one and unchangeable, the multiple, varied, moving world in which we live was unreal and an illusion. But they had not realized the necessity of showing how such a reality could appear to be other than it was, and where the illusion came from. Heraclitus, in spite of the ever-living Fire, had never found a common denominator for the Logos and the flux. Nor had Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus satisfactorily accounted for the fact that things as we perceive them are so different from things as they are. And now Socrates would have been in the same fix. He had transferred all the reality in a thing from its concrete, individual aspect to the abstract Form or nature of which it was an instance. But if the abstract Forms of things alone were real, how came it that there was anything besides the Forms? Why were there a myriad individual instances of beauty and justice as well as the one pure and undivided essence of justice-in-itself, or beauty-in-itself? What was the relation of the shifting world of individual, concrete objects to this immaterial and eternal reality?

Socrates, according to the theory we are discussing, in some measure perceived and dealt with this difficulty. He did not have recourse to the Eleatic theory that the world of sense was all false opinion and illusion. Nor would he accept the suggestion made by his Pythagorean friend, Cebes, that it was a

mere image or likeness of Reality.<sup>38</sup> The relation between the two worlds was closer—was one, not of divorce, but of marriage—and he expressed it by the term “participation.” The particular thing, we might say, is real, to be sure, only in so far as it has or “participates in” Form. But no concrete object partakes of only one Form, nor is any Form exhausted by and confined to only one instance of itself.<sup>39</sup> In any such case the instance would be indistinguishable from the Form that it exemplified and would be identical with it. For example, if a beautiful individual were just beauty in its entirety and nothing else, he would not be a mere instance of beauty but beauty in itself, pure and unadulterated. A beautiful individual, however, has also the human Form which makes him a beautiful man rather than a beautiful horse or cow. He participates likewise in the essence of blackness or brownness or whiteness as the case may be, and he may also have courage and temperance and justice in his make-up. He is then, compounded of many Forms or essences. But each Form in which he shares is in itself absolutely “straight” and uncompounded—is, for example, the essence of beauty and of nothing else, or the Form of courage pure and simple.

It was this overlapping and compounding of Forms, we are told, that in Socrates’ mind accounted for the existence of a sensible, phenomenal world of many, different, individual things. Each concrete object is, to use a mathematical illustration, a point formed by the intersection of a number of Forms. Now a point is nothing but a share or portion of a line. That portion is all it is; in other words, is all the reality it partakes of and possesses. Still, if a point lay only in one line, it would never stand out from the line and “appear” as a separate reality. But cross one line with another, and it “appears,” immediately brought out by the fact of partaking of two lines instead of one. Even in its separate existence, however, the point is in no wise sundered or divorced from the lines on which it lies.

The world of particular things formed in this way by the crossing of many Forms was not unreal and illusory; nor yet

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 161 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 164 ff.



was it a detached copy of the Forms. Sensible objects were rather mixtures and confusions of Forms, in which no one essence could appear entirely or clearly owing to the crowding of the others. Hence particular things, although partaking with all their heart and soul and strength of those essences and drawing all their being from them, appeared incomplete and imperfect in comparison with the purity and completeness of the Forms in themselves. And they impeded the desire of the soul to know and possess reality at the same time that they excited it.

In this way, we are told, Socrates tackled and tried to solve the problem of Appearance *vs.* Reality. If we are right in crediting him with an argument ordinarily charged to Plato, we must regard him as not only the originator of a famous theory of knowledge and explanation of the origin of "value," but also as no inconsiderable metaphysician. And we must of course make still another material alteration in the traditional view of Plato and his relation to Socrates. But whichever view we may feel inclined to adopt, we must remember that we are dealing with an open question, and that the newer hypothesis is by no means universally accepted or the older wholly undermined.

We have now the two portraits of Socrates before us. Fortunately it is not incumbent on us to say which is the better likeness. We have only to compare them, once more note the points in which they agree and differ, and pass on. Over their representation of the outward man we need not linger, since they are alike. We are already sufficiently familiar with the ungainly figure with the snub-nose and the protruding eyes, likened by Alcibiades to a Silenus, but possessed for all that of an extraordinary personal charm and fascination. We have seen him strutting like a water-fowl about the streets and the market-place; or discoursing on love and putting Aristophanes to bed at Agathon's dinner party; or, yet again, conversing with his intimates about the immortality of the soul on the day of his execution. In the background of both pictures we have watched the same crowds of young men trailing after



him, an eager and laughing audience keen to lose no word of the persistent and ruthless questioning and cross-examination with which he wrung from them and, more delightful still, from their elders and betters, a confession of inconsequence and ignorance. And we have noted the graver disciples and friends who stood by him to the end.

Both portraits are also one in their description of the beauty and the nobility of the inner man enclosed within this grotesque and genial exterior. His kindness and tolerance with others, his strictness with himself, the strength of his convictions, his devotion to his principles, the courage and self-sacrifice that bade him die rather than relinquish them—all these are as striking a feature of the one as of the other picture. Again, to whichever we turn, we find the piety, the mysticism, the trances, the voice that admonished him, his belief in the Gods and their overruling Providence guiding all things to some good purpose, his faith in immortality, his preoccupation with the destiny of the soul and with the problems of moral conduct and the good life.

The same man, intellectually, looks down at us, too, from either portrait—with his shrewd, active, witty mind, his intentness on running things to earth, his keenness in detecting the slightest hint of speciousness or inconsistency or ignorance in answer and argument, his unwillingness to accept half-explanations or to be put off short of the whole truth. Finally, no less clearly drawn in the one picture than in the other, we find the characteristic inductive method of sifting general and authoritative definitions out of the confused and seemingly irreconcilable opinions of mankind. There is the same dialectical process of question and answer and comparison of views, in the course of which all interlocutors are slowly but surely backed towards a central point of common agreement.

But here the coincidence ends. From the one representation we get the impression of a man, not only disgusted with previous and contemporary systems, but disillusioned as to the ability of philosophy to discover any world-ground whatsoever or do more than enlighten men regarding the character of their

own best interests and the conduct necessary to fulfill them. We are disappointed, indeed, at his readiness to substitute for philosophic inquiry and speculation a naïve and unpondered faith in the immortality of the soul, the existence of the Gods, and their providential ordering of all things for the best. And we have to regret, not only the narrowing of Socrates' mind and interest upon the single problem of human conduct and ideals, but also a singularly bourgeois and Philistine lack of perception in solving it, which tends to ignore civilization and to accept law, order, and prosperity without elegance, refinement, and beauty, as sufficient for the full measure of the sovereign good. When all is said and done, the eyes that look out at us from this portrait are blank, blind as they are to the charms and claims of the Muses and the Graces, and focused in short-sighted content upon the homely virtues as the only necessary and desirable consorts of a well-lived life. Yet for all that, this picture is in most critics' opinion the truer likeness of the man.

The eyes of the other Socrates—the Orphic and the Pythagorean philosopher painted by some recent critics—are quite different. They are very far away and dreamy. The expression of aversion from people like Anaxagoras and the Sophists is there, to be sure. But it is not the aversion that a childlike piety and unargued faith might feel from skepticism or materialism. The look is fixed more profoundly upon a new system and a new world-ground that it has discovered. It penetrates the world of sense and appearance with its earnest scrutiny to find there, not blank nothingness, as did the Sophists, nor yet atoms moving in the void, but rather a heaven of Pythagorean Forms, justice-in-itself, courage-in-itself, temperance-in-itself, and the whole host of virtues and qualities, august, perfect, universal, eternal, unchangeably the same in all things, times, and places. This new Socrates sees, too, that particular objects draw all their reality from sharing in these pure and changeless essences, and that without them the sensible world would relapse into blankness without form or name. But he knows also that since individual things participate in many Forms they can possess none clearly or wholly, and hence must

appear as the incomplete and confused members of a multiple and changing world.

Moreover, with the fascinated gaze of the Pythagorean mystic, and possibly of the Orphic initiate, the other Socrates has a vision of the soul moving before birth among these heavenly Realities and bringing down into the tomb and prison of the body "shadowy recollections" of their nature and vague yearnings for their perfection, which are stirred and kindled by her contact with the things of sense. To his eye it is now plain how knowledge is possible and what it really is, and whence the soul receives her inductive power of perceiving the similarities in objects of sense. He understands how she can compare and classify them, and recognize and name their Forms. Again, he sees why we have not only minds but hearts as well, comprehends the true meaning and aim of our "first affections" and natural impulses, and is able to lay down authoritatively what the discipline of love and desire must be, if man is to regain his birthright and attain his true good. This good, far from being the middle-class content, righteousness, and prosperity of the more conservative portrait, lies beyond even the Graces and the Muses in the mystical contemplation of the immaterial essences of which Reality is composed. The way thither is not a way of vulgar worldly success, nor yet of the enlightenment and perfection of human life within the four-score years and the loveliness of this green earth that are its physical limits. It is an inner way, heedless of external fortune, undisturbed by bodily and worldly desires, uncaptivated by the beauty of outward things and of the vision of all that man can do and be in the short span before death closes all. He who follows it is intent only on loosening the ties that bind the soul to the body and to material things, and on so schooling her that she may profit by the release of death to escape from the "weary, sorrowful wheel" of birth and rebirth and enter into uninterrupted communion with the divine.

But whichever picture be correct—whether we regard Socrates as a metaphysician, or as interested only in ethics and logic and willing to take the Gods and immortality on simple faith; and again whether we consider his ethics as representa-



tive of the "orthodox" Hellenic attitude towards life or as "the continuation of the religious side of Pythagoreanism, the Olympian contest of eternal life against the world, the flesh, and the devil"<sup>40</sup>—Socrates was really only a pioneer of a new interest and a new movement in philosophy. His development of argument by question and answer and of induction was, indeed, a considerable contribution to the growth of logic; and we may regard him as perhaps the father of ethics as a separate study and science. And again, if he is to be credited with taking over the Pythagorean Forms in a logical rather than a geometrical sense and with composing his Reality of the formal definitions or natures of things, to him rather than to Plato must be attributed the first shifting of the accent of reality from Matter to Form, and the first attempt to conceive the world-ground, not as concrete stuff, or even as a substance endowed with motion and life and consciousness, but as something wholly abstract and immaterial.

Still, Socrates' real mission after his death as during his life was to be a philosophic gadfly stinging men on to fresh thought and speculation. His failure to reply satisfactorily to the new questions that he had raised gave philosophy a fresh opening and incentive. His theory of Reality, if he had one, gave a novel vista and created problems heretofore unsuspected by suggesting that the Nature of Things might be immaterial. The doctrine of the participation of sensible objects in Form, if it is his and not Plato's, revealed another aspect of the case of Appearance *vs.* Reality. The theory of recollection evoked a thousand perplexities as to the possibility of knowledge and its relation to truth and Reality. His mystical ethics propounded rather than overcame difficulties, since the abstract Forms of the Good and of the several virtues needed, as Plato soon realized, to be stuffed with some sort of concrete application to life before they could be made relevant to human nature. One had first to be sure what man was really after, what he wanted, and what contented him, before one could determine just what Form the good would take.

Nor does it help us, so far as his ethics are concerned, to

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 266.



revert to the view that Socrates took no interest in metaphysics, but was a moralist pure and simple with a tendency to fall back upon the Sophists' ideal of the good. For the statement that the goal of moral conduct is material success, or even that it is virtuous living, arouses a suspicion in thoughtful minds that means are being mistaken for ends, and raises rather than answers the question of the real aim of human life. Even, then, considered as a hard-headed practical student of ethics with no mystical nonsense about him, Socrates sets a problem instead of solving one. He confronts us with the difficulty of finding out the things which the human organism naturally pursues as ends in themselves, not as means to anything beyond them, in the possession of which it finds its final satisfaction and peace. But his scattered analyses of different moral qualities and his attempt to make knowledge the principle of unity and the essence of all the virtues afford no key—or keyhole—to the difficulty.

Socrates, in a word, ushers us into the future. His doctrine of definitions or universals, and still more of Pythagorean Forms, if he held it, his dialectic, and his theory of knowledge as recollection lead us directly to Plato. And in their mystical form his ethics might well stimulate more mysticism, and in their practical aspects could not but provoke immediate attempts to break through the vicious circle of definition by synonym and fill in the Form of the Good with a definite content drawn from a study of human life. These developments of moral theory will form the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MEGARICS, CYNICS, AND CYRENAICS

#### I

#### THE MEGARICS

As we saw in the last chapter, Socrates bequeathed to his followers some philosophic property but an equal if not a larger legacy of debt in the shape of difficult and unsolved problems. He had asked and raised novel and irritating questions, but he had answered none satisfactorily, even though we credit him with the Pythagorean doctrine of Forms, the theory of knowledge as recollection, and the vision of the Good set forth by Plato in the *Republic*. His disciples could not begin to live on what he had left them. Indeed, they had to make their own way in the world with a great amount of unfinished business on their hands. But they had been left with enough to see that they could make more, and to feel that if they could succeed in winding up their master's affairs and paying off what he owed they would be rich.

To Socrates' credit stood the fact that by his ironical method of argument through the cross-examination and dissection of his opponents' views, and by his sure though painful extraction of straightforward and generally accepted definitions from their muddled and contradictory replies, he had fostered, if not actually sired, logic and had set it up in life as an independent and flourishing philosophic concern. Again, by bringing his relentless search for knowledge to rest in the apparently final and universally accepted definitions that he had discovered beneath the confusion and antagonism of individual opinions, he had started a theory of knowledge which promised much and must inevitably egg men on to ponder still further

upon the meaning of such terms as "knowledge" and "truth." He had also fomented a revolution in metaphysics if he really taught that the proper object of knowledge and repository of truth were to be found in the Pythagorean Forms, and that Reality itself was not a stuff but something immaterial and abstract. And finally, his restriction of the search for clear and universally received definitions to the sphere of human conduct, and his teaching that virtue lay in knowing what was good for man, pushed the question "What is the good?" into the limelight. Pressed and guided by his fatherly hand, ethics made a bold début and an immediate hit upon the stage of European thought, where thenceforth it was to play to an admiring public the rôle, now of leading lady, and again of the watchful nurse and confidante or the stern and admonitory duenna.

Still, Socrates had done little beyond altering the course of speculation and starting it on its new way. He had shifted, we might say, the stream of thought from its old bed worn deep through successive strata of world-stuffs, and had diverted it towards other channels whose direction he had roughly indicated. But the meanderings of these channels were so vaguely marked, and they were as yet such shallow depressions in the substance of Greek philosophy, that it remained for them to cut their new paths and make their own beds in a comparatively untouched soil.

## II

Among the older and more devoted disciples of Socrates was a Megarian named Euclid. His city and Athens, to be sure, had been on the worst possible terms short of open war ever since 446 B. C. In that year Megara, without any real grievance, had broken away from the Athenian alliance and protectorate which she had formerly sought of her own free will, and had aligned herself with the hostile Peloponnesian group, thus depriving Athens of an important strategic frontier and exposing Attica to easy invasion from the Spartan coalition. This ill-feeling had culminated, just prior to the Peloponnesian War, in an Athenian decree forbidding any

Megarian to enter or do business, not only in the capital, but in any port of the Empire. Euclid, however, was so attached to Socrates that even in these harsh circumstances and at the peril of his life he persisted in secretly entering Athens disguised as a woman in order to visit his master. He was present, too, at Socrates' death thirty-three years later, and it was at his house in Megara that Plato took refuge when some of the better known and more prominently associated disciples, particularly if they belonged to the aristocratic party, found it prudent to leave Athens for a while.

But Euclid served two masters. He was also of the Eleatic persuasion, and his admiration for Parmenides was only second to his love for Socrates. The result was that he attempted to fuse the Socratic and the Eleatic teachings. He held firmly to the Parmenidean doctrine that Reality was one, simple, and unchangeable. He believed that the plurality, the difference, the variety, the restless change, the motion, the ceaseless coming into and passing out of being, with which the sensible world about us was everywhere flickering and shimmering, were all unreal and non-existent, the figments of false opinion. And he drew the Eleatic conclusion that the senses, which unrolled before us this film of dream and illusion with its passing show of many, rainbow-tinted, interchanging and dissolving shapes, were altogether deceitful and untrustworthy. Thought and reasoning alone could acquaint us with Reality.

The words that Euclid had from Socrates' lips seemed to him to supplement and throw more light upon this Parmenidean teaching. He had heard him say, year in, year out, that thought and reasoning could not be assured of knowing what a thing really was until they had discovered the general class to which it belonged. All that was real in an object, then—or in other words, all its Eleatic Being—might well appear to lie in the logical definition or form that gave it its nature and made it what it was. Everything else—its concrete particular existence, its material substance, its seeming flesh and blood—was but illusion. That the Eleatic "Way of Truth" led to such a Reality must have impressed Euclid all the more clearly if Socrates himself under Orphic-Pythagorean influence had pushed on into metaphysics and declared that class-



concepts or Forms, which, in his opinion, were the goal of knowledge, were also the very essence of the universe.

Furthermore, Socrates' absorption in ethics had tended to make him lose sight of all classes or forms except those of moral qualities such as justice-in-itself, courage-in-itself, temperance-in-itself and the like. And he had introduced as a principle of unity among the virtues their common knowledge of what is good, suggesting at the same time that the object of that knowledge—the Good—was correspondingly one. It was not unreasonable to argue that by rights there could be only one real and final class-concept or Form in the Socratic philosophy—the Form of the Good.

Socrates, then, to one bred in the Parmenidean tradition might well seem to be tottering on the brink of Eleaticism. And conversely, Parmenides, though he had apparently conceived Reality as a compact ball of simple and unchanging material substance, had so denuded it of physical qualities that he might strike an admirer of Socrates as verging upon a definition of Being in terms of mere Form. His sphere, when deflated of all tangible content, seemed about to collapse into a pure abstraction, an immaterial roundness-in-itself. One had only to substitute the Form of the Good for that of the sphere in order to bring the Eleatic into line with the Socratic teaching. And this was perhaps all the more easily effected by Euclid in view of the aesthetic perfection of the spherical form to the Greek eye and the fusion of the aesthetic and the moral in the Greek mind. To be round was to possess already a good form.

In any case, whatever the precise train of Euclid's thought may have been, it led him to the conclusion that the Socratic good possessed all the earmarks of Eleatic being. The Good was single, simple, homogeneous, unchanging, always the same. What was it then except *the* One, the sole Reality? Men might call it by many names, to be sure, such as Wisdom, God, Mind, and the like, but these were mere tricks of speech. Nothing but the Good really existed, and anything opposed to or different from it was a matter of false opinion and illusion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert., II, x, 106. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 222 ff. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, Bk. IV, 8, § 2.

Of anything further that Euclid may have said about the nature of either the One or the Good we have no record; and, as matters stand, both concepts seem to have remained quite bankrupt under his receivership and to have gained nothing in the way of tangible properties and assets from being merged. For to define the Good as the One and the One as the Good, and to say nothing more about either of them, added nothing to our knowledge of the nature of either the Good or of Being. It may be, indeed, that now and then Euclid caught himself thinking of the Good as something solid and round, for it is difficult to think without imagery, and the Eleatic sphere was the only image to which he had fallen heir. But to envisage the Good as globular would have been no great step in advance. However, there is one point at least to Euclid's credit, and that an important one; he was, barring a perhaps Pythagorean Socrates, the first philosopher whom we find distinctly on his way towards conceiving Reality not as a world-stuff but as something wholly immaterial. And as such he helps shift the accent of Reality from Matter to Form and leads us on towards Plato and Aristotle.

The followers of Euclid devoted most of their time and effort to playing, though with no great stakes or winnings, the new and delightful game of logic. They noisily discussed, for example, whether or not we can be said to be lying if at the time we admit that we are; and whether a man whom we see but do not recognize can be said to be known to us. They were further responsible for such questions as our familiar catch of asking, "Have you left off beating your grandmother yet?", and the puzzle "How many hairs must a man lose to be bald?", or "How many grains does it take to make a heap?"—a catch with which we are perhaps best acquainted in the well-known problem of determining at what point a horse that is fed one less wisp of hay a day will eventually starve. Much of this of course was mere quibbling for the sake of quibbling, but the fact that hair-splitting and wrangling became all at once so philosophically smart testifies to a wide-spread and rapidly growing interest in logic as a distinct and independent branch of thought, to be cultivated of it-

self for the delightfully intriguing character of its special problems.

Moreover, it must be said in justice to the Megarics that the puzzle about the hairs of the bald-headed man covered a really clever argument, originated perhaps by Euclid himself, against the real existence of the manifold and varied world of sense and of the stuff of which the older philosophers had said that the universe was composed. The Many, it was held, could not really exist because it was impossible to determine logically the point at which the Many, as contrasted with a few, came into existence; witness the insuperable difficulty of telling when a number of grains turn from a few into a heap. The Many, then, since reason could issue them no birth certificates, could never have been born and therefore did not exist. This argument was supplemented, apparently, by a demonstration that the infinite diversity of a world-stuff made it equally impossible to find any end to the Many and therefore to count and define, or even to reach, the manifold constituents of which a material world must be made. Hence the Many and matter could not be objects of knowledge, and for that reason could not have any real existence.

In much the same vein the Megarics attacked the possibility of motion, chance, and annihilation and examined the concept of possibility itself. In the main they followed the Eleatic arguments and particularly the paradoxes of Zeno, but they made their position more untenable by admitting, like Melissus, the reality of time, with its differences of past, present, and future. As a result, they were forced to grant the reality of the altered aspects and places of things from moment to moment, and found themselves compelled to accept the *fait accompli* that a change had occurred from one day to another although it was logically impossible that such a change could occur. Their admission of the reality of time also led them to modify the Eleatic, and for that matter the older Megaric, view that, since the one and only Reality was once and for all finished and unchangeable, it was a contradiction in terms to talk of Being that was merely possible but not actual, and to say that a capacity that was not realized was nevertheless



real. From this point of view the range of the possible was strictly limited to that which existed as a matter of fact, and conversely everything now non-existent was also forever incapable of existing. The later members of the School, however, had to take the reality of the future into their calculations, and to concede that the capacities of the possible were not all realized by what was actual at the moment but also really held whatever the morrow might bring forth. But they re-stiffened Reality by declaring that nothing could happen otherwise than it did, thus excluding from Being any flexible, undetermined element of chance. Along with this interest in the problem of possibility went considerable curiosity about the implications of the conjunction "if," and about the relation of hypothetical and conditional statements to truth.

Among the followers of Euclid we need only mention by name Stilpo, a late contemporary of Aristotle's. He made, to be sure, no innovation of importance in the Megaric doctrines, but he conjoined with them the ethical teaching of the Cynics, to which we are about to turn. Moreover, even if he himself did not blend the two philosophies into a system, the combination was effected by his pupil Zeno, the founder of the Stoic School. We may therefore conveniently keep Stilpo in mind as a connecting link in the evolution of ancient thought, through which the characteristics inherited from Euclid and Antisthenes were transmitted to one of the great philosophers of the Greco-Roman period.

And now let us turn back to the disciples of Socrates of a less metaphysical turn of mind, who confined their investigations largely to ethics and endeavored to find out what their master really had meant by virtue and the good.

### III

#### THE CYNICS

Antisthenes, the founder of the Cynic School, was already a man of mature years when he fell in with Socrates. He was born at Athens early in the latter half of the Fourth Century, the son of an Athenian citizen and a Thracian slave woman.



In his youth he had been a pupil of Gorgias and in friendly relations with other well-known Sophists, and had himself instructed in the art of worldly success and appeared as a pleader in the lawcourts. He had also seen military service and shown himself a brave soldier. But after he met Socrates the old loves were quickly forgotten. Although he lived at the Peiraeus, some five miles from Athens, he used to tramp every day to town and back in order to visit his new found master. And he, too, like Euclid, is mentioned by Plato as among those present at Socrates' death.

In spite, however, of his fidelity he cannot have been a favorite member of the Socratic circle. He seems to have been a rough, stupid, and obstinate man, disdainful of the amenities of existence and lacking the intellectual brilliance that sometimes compensates for want of manners and refinement. And he was already accentuating these unsympathetic traits by affecting the severe and uncouth rule and ways of life for which the Cynics were afterwards noted. Socrates had been simple and casual enough in his habits and dress, but Antisthenes went him one better. He ostentatiously carried a beggar's staff and wallet as a sign of independence of spirit and lack of worldly possessions, which he thought all wise men should cultivate. Like his master he persisted in wearing on all occasions the coarse Spartan cloak used by the Athenians only for military purposes, and considered by them quite the reverse of smart for civilian dress. But he pushed simplicity even further by dispensing with an undergarment and merely folding the mantle in two thicknesses to make good the deficiency. The more ragged a mantle he could display the more manly he felt himself—which once prompted Socrates to say to him, "I can see your vanity through your cloak."<sup>2</sup>

With two at least of his fellow-disciples we know that he was not on the most cordial terms. He had an almost puritan terror of enjoyment, and was horrified at his comrade Aristippus' view that, according to Socrates, pleasure was the goal and justification of moral action. "I had rather go mad than feel pleasure," is reported to have been one of his favorite

<sup>2</sup> Diog. Laert., VI. i, 4, § 8.

exclamations.<sup>3</sup> Plato, too, he rubbed the wrong way. The latter refers to him as a doddering "old man, too old to learn,"<sup>4</sup> and more than one story has come down to us testifying to their sharp disputes over the Platonic view that Reality is composed of immaterial Forms, and to the quickness of wit with which the younger man parried the blundering attacks of his opponent.

After the execution of Socrates Antisthenes went back to teaching. He felt, as every disciple generally does, that he was the one of all others really to understand Socrates' inmost thoughts, and he devoted himself with all his might to expounding them. Just out of Athens there was a school called Cynosarges open to the children of citizens and foreigners, who were technically bastards because of the Athenian law forbidding mixed marriages. Here Antisthenes, being himself technically illegitimate, established himself. If anything, he discouraged disciples by his disagreeable, even brutal treatment of those who sought to attach themselves to him, and by the harsh novitiate of the over-simple life through which he put them. It is uncertain whether the term "Cynic" comes from the Greek word for dog, referring to the veritable "dog's life" which Antisthenes and his companions deliberately tried to lead, or from the Cynosarges school in the precincts of which they habitually met.

Better known to posterity than Antisthenes is his pupil, and in some ways his opposite, the humorous, original, self-willed, and austere Diogenes. He was a young counterfeiter who had been forced to flee his native town of Sinope in Asia Minor and had taken refuge at Athens. He became attracted to Antisthenes by whom, it is said, he was at first beaten off with a stick, but his persistence won out in the end and he was received as a disciple. Once accepted, he abandoned himself to Socratic simplicities with such extraordinary fervor that he won for himself the title of a "Socrates gone mad." He dispensed with a house and lived in a tub, and was found in broad daylight wandering the streets with a lantern searching for

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, i, 4, § 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Sophist*, 251 B. (Cf. Deussen, *Philosophie der Griechen*, p. 201.)

somebody worthy to be called a man. He had begun, too, by drinking water from a cup, but the sight of a child drinking from its hand had shamed him from such artificiality and shown him the simple and more natural way. But the oddity of his behavior could not conceal a sterling character, and perhaps accentuated an unusual personal charm and winning manner. When he spoke, we are told, he laid a magic spell upon his hearers.<sup>5</sup>

Diogenes, however, was not destined to end his eccentric career in Athens. Pirates carried him off one day when he was crossing to Aegina and eventually sold him into slavery. The purchaser, a rich Corinthian, made him the steward of his household and the tutor of his children. These situations he filled in so satisfactory a manner, and so won the respect of his owner and of his erstwhile charges, that later when he was freed he was invited to live with them, and made his home with the family until his death.

He took also to expounding his philosophical views in public again, gathered about him an audience and a following, and became one of the chief sights and boasts of Corinth. Indeed, when Alexander the Great was passing through the city, he paid a special call upon the old man, whom he found lying basking in the sun. With royal condescension he asked what he could do for him. "Stand a bit out of my light, will you?" replied Diogenes. The king meekly complied, exclaiming, "If I were not Alexander, I'd like to be Diogenes."<sup>6</sup> By a curious coincidence the two men died on the same day in 323 B. C. Though he had forbidden his friends to make any fuss about his body, the Corinthians gave their philosopher a public funeral and built for him a tomb surmounted by a dog of Parian marble. And Sinope, whose coinage he had counterfeited in his youth, erected a monument in his honor.

One more member of the school, Crates of Thebes, must be mentioned before we pass on to a consideration of the Cynic teaching. He was the most famous of the followers of Diogenes, by the magic spell of whose words he was bewitched into

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert., VI, ii, 10, §§ 75-76.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, VI, ii, 6, §§ 32, 38.



giving away a fortune of nearly four hundred thousand dollars and adopting the austerities of the Cynic rule. His most marked peculiarity lay perhaps in his habit of forcing his way into the houses of the well-to-do and rebuking the inmates for their way of living—from which sociable custom he got the name of “door-opener.”<sup>7</sup> Something of Diogenes’ fascination and silver-tongue must also have descended upon him, for not only did he inspire a *grande passion* in a rich Thracian girl, who, in spite of the opposition of her family, took to the Cynic life for love of him and finally persuaded him to marry her, but to cap the episode he also converted his new brother-in-law.

The Cynic School lasted as an independent organization for another century, but its better features and the better men who might otherwise have embraced its tenets were appropriated by the far finer Stoic philosophy. In its later years it was but a shadow and caricature of its former self. Even in its earlier and more vigorous phase the search for the state of nature, the cult of absolute simplicity, and the scorn for everything that could be considered in any wise artificial or superfluous, had led to a contempt for even the most cherished and venerable human institutions, such as marriage and the family for example, and to a nakedness of conduct that struck the ancients themselves, in spite of their genial and liberal standards, as improper and shameless. It is from the Cynic’s disposition to sneer at everything that most men hold sacred that the word “cynic” as we commonly use it has become in some measure a term of reproach. And it was this husk of exaggeration and extravagance, apparently, that lingered after the old, serious spirit had fled, for of the two last lights among the school of whom we have any record one was a Phoenician ex-slave, a mere lip-server of a money lender and miser, who hanged himself when he lost his fortune, and the other, a superstitious charlatan who used to go about got up in the dress and mask of a Fury declaring that he had come up out of hell to keep an eye on sinners and report their doings to the powers below.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, v, 1, § 86.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, ix, 1, § 102.



Now the Cynics led this queer life of theirs, which made them such striking figures of the times, in the name of Socrates. When they took to their tubs, drank out of their hands, wandered the streets like mendicant friars with ragged cloaks and the beggar's staff and bowl, and paraded in public the more intimate concerns of the private life, they did it for his sake, and believed themselves simply to be putting his preaching into practice. And when they poured out their scorn upon even such amenities of existence as education and culture, and defied and sneered at the social conventions and institutions of their day, they felt that they were but driving home his message to the world. It is then with some curiosity that we ask what this theory of theirs was regarding the true inwardness of Socrates' teaching, which inspired their strange behavior and gave them the assurance to prescribe it as a panacea to all men.

It is not easy to answer this question with any clearness or certainty. The works of Antisthenes, which were highly esteemed but so voluminous that he was called by an ill-disposed critic a "universal chatterbox,"<sup>9</sup> have all been lost, and from the gossiping historian, Diogenes Laertius, and the other commentators we can get no complete or definite account of his teaching. Nor are we any better off, so far as first-hand knowledge of the other members of the School is concerned. But the evidence is sufficient to assure us in the first place that the Cynics' attention was focussed on morals, and that their interest was engrossed in answering the questions, "What is virtue?", "What is happiness?", "What is the good?", to which Socrates' replies had been so inconclusive.<sup>10</sup> Antisthenes' native lack of broadmindedness and of philosophic curiosity, as well as his earlier Sophistic environment and education, predisposed him to share his master's contempt for speculations that led only to world-stuffs, and even for any scientific inquiry whose results were not immediately useful to human life and favorable to moral conduct. The same influences must also have blinded him to any possible Pythagorean mysticism that, as we have seen, may have lurked in Socrates' views.

Moreover, the harshness and illiberality of Antisthenes' mind

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, ii, 9, § 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, viii, 9, § 103.

would seem also to have prevented him from viewing even ethics scientifically, and from following the dispassionate and carefully reasoned methods of treating the subject that Socrates had employed. His moral theory was inspired by sentiment rather than by thought and reflection. His austere and unsocial nature, independent to the verge of savagery, instinctively admired and selected what he conceived to be similar characteristics in his beloved teacher; and he leaped without looking to the conclusion that these qualities were the fruits by which the true significance of the Socratic doctrine was to be known. It was, he felt, Socrates' simplicity of life, his few wants, his superb indifference to the things to which the run of mankind is enslaved by desire and fear and avarice and ambition, that had kept him so calm, so cheerful, so upright, so foursquare to the blows of fortune, so imperturbably happy even in the drinking of the hemlock. But if this independence of spirit was the secret of Socrates' virtue and goodness, was it not also the key to his theory of the nature of virtue and happiness? We would seem at last to have found the answer to our question. Virtue was simply the knowledge and cultivation, happiness the possession, of this inner strength of character and peace of mind which the world could neither give nor take away.

The central and all-important concept, then, in the Cynic ethics was that of indifference and independence in the face of external circumstance. Any other attitude towards the world, they felt, put human happiness at the mercy of conditions over which man had no control. But if only we knew how to maintain our composure and serenity unbroken by destiny, then we were in truth the masters, not the slaves, of whatever fate might bring. The lesson of indifference, the training of the "unconquerable soul," was difficult, to be sure, but all men were free and able to learn it, if only they would. And once taken to heart, it deprived the stings and arrows of fortune, however outrageous, of their power to wound, and made man invincible and his happiness secure. This stern gospel of independence on the world, with its harsh call to steel one's happiness, through indifference, against whatever life might have

in store, became, in a more kindly, a more urbane, and a more healing form, the great message of the Stoics, who infused it also with the soft and consoling belief that all things are really for the best and contribute somehow to the perfection of the universe as a whole. And with or without this added touch of piety, it provides again to-day, not only a haven in which almost all thoughtful minds seek refuge, for a while at least, at some time or other in their journey, but also a final anchorage for many a drifting and weary soul who has found no sure bottom elsewhere to the sea of life.

From this central idea of the good as indifference and independence in the face of external circumstance the Cynic ethics radiated. Since we can accustom ourselves to going without things and can cultivate independence, virtue can be taught, as Socrates had said; and since, as the Sophists had pointed out, what is once known is never forgotten, or, in other words, since what has become habitual is a fixed part of oneself, virtue is a permanent acquisition when once it is learned. Seeing, too, that the same attitude of indifference to external circumstance inspires all the acts, however diverse, of every virtuous man, Socrates was right in insisting that virtue is one, not many, and that it is the same in all sorts and conditions of men. Moreover, in view of the fact that educating oneself to a calm and indifferent attitude is practically the same as attaining it, and that hence to be virtuous is to be happy, we can say that virtue is to all intents and purposes the same as happiness and that it is an end in itself. Hence the famous Cynic doctrine of "virtue for virtue's sake," which we shall do well to fix in our memory, along with independence and imperturbability, as one of the watchwords of the sect.

It would be wrong, however, to regard Socrates' teaching as the sole inspiration of the Cynic doctrine. Antisthenes, it will be remembered, had begun his philosophic career as a Sophist, and his early training seems to have ingrained in him a feeling, which the influence of Socrates never eradicated, that all human standards and institutions are purely relative, and that there are as many truths and ways of being virtuous and happy as there are individuals. He had no patience, as we



have already seen, with the Platonic view, perhaps also to be attributed to Socrates, that Reality is composed, not of concrete particular objects, but rather of the abstract and general classes of which these objects are the incomplete embodiments and fleeting instances. Even Socrates' desire to construct a scientific ethics by comparing large numbers of individual cases of conduct and drawing from them general rules and definitions left him unsympathetic and uncomprehending. This Protagorean twist to his thinking not only colored his moral theory but influenced deeply his views on logic and the possibility of knowledge. And we shall perhaps understand his ethics better, if we stop now for a moment to inquire what those views were.

Antisthenes' logic and theory of the nature of reasoning and knowledge radiated, like his ethics, from his doctrine of self-sufficiency and independence. He was sure that different individuals, if they were really different and really individual, could not possibly be covered by the same definition, partake of the same nature, and have identical qualities and predicates. Each particular object had rather its own distinct and unique character and place, and was entitled to its own special, private definition and to treatment on its own merits. It was literally the only case of its particular kind. Its form, its nature, its properties, belonged to it alone, and were not shared with anything else. My type, for example, was not your type; my nature was not your nature; my goodness or badness was not of the same quality as yours, and could not be defined by the same terms. That both our natures were called "human," and that your acts as well as mine were called "good" or "bad," meant, not that they were the same in essence, but merely that at first glance they looked alike. To take such superficial and chance likenesses seriously, and to try to make the same definition do for one object as did equally well for another, was to destroy the self-sufficiency and independence of both objects alike. To put me in the same class with you, was, if that class was a real thing, to merge me with you and to reduce the two of us to a couple of instances or manifestations of one and the same nature.

The general headings, then, under which we grouped par-



ticular things, and the common forms and types which we attributed to them, could have no real existence and could give us no true knowledge. They were mere artificial confectious built up out of the most casual and surface resemblances. They might make a specious pretense at telling us what an object was like, but they failed to pry into and detect its individual nature—its private home life, as it were—and tell us what the object really was. To call John Smith a “man,” for example, added nothing to our knowledge of him. To know the real John Smith, we must rather know the peculiarities that set him apart from all other so-called “men” and made him his own unique self.<sup>11</sup>

The views that we have just been setting forth were to make a stir in the subsequent history of logic and epistemology. New and curious vistas in the theory of knowledge were opened by Antisthenes’ flat contradiction of the socialistic metaphysics, so ardently defended by his young confrère Plato, that what is real, valuable, and sacred in individual things is not their private lives and properties but the general type which they share with other members of the same class. The Cynics’ insistence upon the unreality and non-existence of such attenuated and abstract things as universal types and forms, and their teaching that class names are mere nicknames and tags, as it were, indicating nothing of the true nature of the individual object, make them, along with the Cyrenaics, the first exponents of the famous “nominalistic” theory that the names of general concepts are mere “breathings of the voice” which find no echo either in any impression existing in the mind or in any objective reality. And their battle with Plato over this point was the beginning of an endless dispute which raged with theological violence during the Middle Ages in the so-called Realistic-Nominalistic controversy, and which, in one form or another still agitates modern thought.

If the reports of Plato and Aristotle are to be trusted, Antisthenes drew from his “nominalism” rather startling logical conclusions. In the first place, since each individual object is independent, self-sufficing, and unique and cannot be

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 251–256.

put in the same class with any other, it proves impossible to say that one thing is true of another. We cannot, for example, attribute goodness to man, and make the statement "Man is good." For to say that man is good would be to put man in a class with other good things, like sugar and temperance, and make of him merely one among many instances of goodness in general. That is, it would make him belong to a class other than his own, and would thus destroy his independent, distinct existence and nature. We can only say, then, that man is man, and good is good; or, in other words, drawn from the vocabulary of logic, we can pass only "identical" judgments upon things. "Synthetic" judgments, in which, by predicating one thing of another, a number of things are put together and made to intersect, as it were, in the same object, are out of the question. But "synthetic" judgments are precisely those by which we learn more and more about an object and advance and increase knowledge generally. Merely "identical" propositions are as useless as they are undeniable. Antisthenes, then, when he denied the possibility of predication would seem to have rendered knowledge impossible as well.<sup>12</sup>

Again Antisthenes was forced to admit that, given his premises, there could be no such things as contradictory propositions. Take John Smith, for instance. We have already seen that nothing except his own form or nature can be predicated of him, and that we may therefore say of him, not that he is "good," or "white," or even that he is a "man," but only that he is John Smith and nothing else. But if that is the case, where is there any possible ground for contradiction in our statements regarding him? If you and I both say that he is John Smith—and this is all we can say about him and keep to the point—we agree. If, however, you say of him that he is good, and I, that he is bad, we are not really predicating contradictory qualities of *him*, since nothing can be properly said of him except that he is John Smith. We are rather dragging him into an entirely irrelevant description, on your part of goodness, on mine of badness. Neither of us is talking any longer about him, or about the same thing. But if we are not

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Plato, *Sophist*, 251 A.

talking about the same thing, we cannot possibly be contradicting each other.<sup>13</sup>

It follows, as Aristotle points out, that it is impossible to make a false proposition of any sort. For if we say that a man is a man, or an apple an apple, we are saying something so true that it is tautological. And if, in addition, we still attempt the impossible and persist in saying that man is good and the apple red, all that we have really succeeded in doing is to repeat, "Man is man, apple is apple," and to add, "Good is good, red is red," which are equally tautological statements. In the same way every so-called false proposition, however outrageous and absurd it may appear, turns out merely to be a couple of tiresome truths which have nothing to do with each other. To say, for instance, that the moon is made of green cheese acquaints us merely with the self-evident fact that not only is the moon the moon, but green cheese is green cheese.

To see Antisthenes losing himself in these logical blind alleys was naturally most pleasing to both Plato and Aristotle, who delighted in exposing the fallacies in a point of view so inimical to their own teaching. But these fallacies need not further detain us. We may remark, however, in passing, that like the Megaric quibbling, although in a much more serious and weighty manner, they testify to the rapidity with which logical problems were coming to the fore. And they show particularly, taken in connection with the bitter dispute between Antisthenes and Plato, how acute the question of the possibility and meaning of predicating one thing of another had suddenly become for the thought of the day.

But Antisthenes' heart was as little in logical inquiries and problems as it was in investigations of the nature of the universe, except so far as they helped point a moral and adorn a tale of conduct and happiness. His interest was in ethics and ethics alone; and it is to this side of his heritage of Sophistic relativity and individualism that we now return. The moral pointed by his theory of knowledge was plain. In practice, as in logical theory, the individual, not the group, must

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Met.*, V, 29. Top I, 11. (Alex., *Schol. in Arist.*, 832.) Cf. Plato, *Euthydemus*, 286 A, quoted by Zeller, *Socrates*, etc., p. 255, note 1.



be the real unit of human life. Conventions and institutions, family and country, society and the state—everything, in a word, that seemed to bind individuals together and to make them depend upon one another and really share one another's lives—had no more basis in nature and in fact than did the general classes and universal forms and types about which Plato was making such a fuss. Human society was a no less artificial figment than human nature in general. As the one was suggested by superficial likenesses between Tom, Dick, and Harry, so the other rested upon an equally superficial agreement between their interests and actions. To attribute, therefore, a real moral authority to human institutions, and to stake the virtue and the happiness of the individual upon his relation to them, was all of one cloth with the foolish assertion that particular objects are nothing but instances of general types and that the individual man owes all the existence and character he possesses to a share of "universal" human nature. No; Tom, Dick, and Harry and all the rest did not depend for their virtue and happiness upon their relations to one another or upon social conventions, usages and institutions, to say nothing of more material conditions. Each one of them came naturally outfitted with all that was needed for doing right, being good, and attaining peace and contentment. The individual could be virtuous and happy in and by himself. The Sophists, then, seemed to agree with Socrates in teaching that the secret of both virtue and happiness lay in severing every tie that might bind a man captive to external circumstance, and their influence tended to confirm, if anything, the faith which his precept and example had excited.

With their twice baked and crusty doctrines thus firmly fixed in their minds, Antisthenes and his School now proceeded to sit in judgment upon their world. Naturally they found it in a bad way. They saw the great majority of mankind clinging for dear life to all sorts of forms, institutions, conventions, and even material conditions, which rendered them hopelessly dependent upon one another and their surroundings for virtue and happiness. That a modicum of such dependence had to be endured the Cynics, to be sure, were forced to admit. Man



must eat and drink, reproduce his species, and wrap and shelter himself from the weather. But even the plainest waiting upon these bare necessities of existence might seem to compromise his dignity and mar the detachment and severity of his inner life. And the slightest unbending, the least interest or feeling of pleasure in satisfying them, made him their slave. As matters stood, however, instead of leaving these fortunately few but unluckily imperative wants naked and serving them grudgingly, man had devoted himself to their comfort, heart and soul, and made of them his masters. He had multiplied them, organized them, complicated them, clothed them, refined them; in a word, he had burdened himself at their behest with what we euphemistically call "civilization." Without all these adjuncts and extras and useless ornamentation he could not feel respectable or successful. As a result his standards of conduct were all astray and his peace of mind was in constant danger.

Take the things by which he set great store—material prosperity, wealth, a great name, social position and prominence, fame and glory as the world understands them. They contributed nothing to true and dependable happiness but rather distracted his attention from it. To stake a career upon attainment of them was to put himself at the mercy of fortune. A turn of her wheel and they were gone, leaving him shivering and miserable, stripped of all that had made a shallow, dependent life worth living. Worst of all, though, was that sedentary and enervating sport, the pursuit of pleasure and the consequent dodging of hardship and hardihood, which poisoned life with feverish desires and unworthy fears and left it flabby and sensitive to the slightest rough handling. And of all pleasures those of love were the most upsetting to true peace of mind.

With the forms and institutions to which the ordinary notions of virtue and respectability were attached the Cynics had as little patience. The whole organization of society was artificial, superfluous, wrong, a hindrance rather than a help to the really good life. Marriage and the family, for example, were needful neither for a due satisfaction of the wants of sex

nor for the propagation of the species. They were therefore unnatural and useless encumbrances to the living of a virtuous life. The same was true of the civil and political constitution of society. All forms of government were equally bad.<sup>14</sup> The mass of mankind, to be sure, might need leading-strings like statutes, regulations, and rules. But let them all become Cynics and live according to the dictates of virtue. Constitutions and laws would then be unnecessary.<sup>15</sup> Nationality and patriotism also were wholly artificial and trumped up. A man was a man, wherever he occurred, and the relations between human beings had nothing to do with accidents of geography. The wise man would ignore such petty and provincial distinctions and be a cosmopolitan. His country was the whole world. In like manner he would ignore all social distinctions, which were as baseless and trumpery as national ones. Even slavery rested upon a wholly artificial ground. Some men, to be sure, were by nature slaves and some rulers; but true freedom and slavery were moral—matters of wisdom and folly—and had nothing to do with any man-made institution.<sup>16</sup>

The economic order, also, had no more rhyme or reason for the virtuous Cynic than the political and social structure of the day. Wealth was not only unnecessary but harmful to virtue and happiness. A medium of exchange like gold was one of the roots of all evil. If there must be a coinage, let it be of bones or stones.<sup>17</sup> Better still, however, would be the direct barter of the products of honest toil. All men should be poor, all should work, living only by the sweat of their brows in emulation of the twelve-times laborious Heracles, man's true patron saint and model.

Finally there was the question of religion. Like everything else in human life it had been cluttered with forms, traditions, conventions, and institutions, and had become a hindrance rather than a help to simple, natural, and virtuous living. Man had created a host of Gods in his own image, and had made

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert., VI, i, 4, § 5, *ibid.*, § 8; ii, 6, § 50, *ibid.*, § 72.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, VI, i, 5, § 11.

<sup>16</sup> Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 274–275, 276, note 1.

<sup>17</sup> Athenaeus, IV, 159.

images and temples, and formal cults and worships, in their honor. But such religion was mostly folly and superstition. Its Gods were mere popular fictions. Its ceremonial was empty show, its temples had no particular sanctity. Its vows and prayers, prophecies and interpretations of dreams, were ridiculous. For its consolations the truly free and independent man could have no use. For him there was, if anything, only one God, to whom wisdom was a sufficient introduction and virtuous living an adequate service. To walk and talk with him it was necessary only to follow the Cynic rule.<sup>18</sup>

Such monumental vice and folly then, as the Cynics saw everywhere smothering and consuming the world about them, called, it seemed to them, for a drastic operation. Palliative and halfway measures would not do. There was nothing for it but to go to the root of the evil and cut in its entirety the cancer of human civilization out of human existence. Only thus could mankind be restored to true virtue and happiness which the artificial growth and vicious refinements of organized society had so nearly destroyed.

To their self-appointed task of converting the world the Cynics devoted themselves with indefatigable zeal, preaching and practicing the simple life with great ostentation, courting publicity on every occasion, and advertising their gospel far and wide by their extraordinary behavior. But their words fell for the most part upon deaf or derisive ears. Like the traditional missionary to the heathen, they dispensed too much rum and clothing with their Bibles, and destroyed what they had come to save. Their ideas were too far-fetched and too befuddled a hodge-podge of the sensible and the absurd to prove more than a counsel of perfection, except for a few select souls. Plato, though he, too, had a scheme for reforming society and agreed with certain points in the Cynic prospectus, like the communizing of women and children, denounced the plan as a whole as fit only for a herd of swine.<sup>19</sup>

Nor were the Cynics themselves all of one mind as to what had best be done. Antisthenes, for example, admitted that marriage was not an unnatural way of reproducing the species

<sup>18</sup> Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-279.

<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Rep.*, II, 372.



and was therefore permissible, whereas Diogenes would have none of such an artificial institution. And Crates, it will be remembered, was very reluctant to submit to the conventions and go through the form of a legal wedding with the enamored Thracian lady who eventually ran him to earth. Again, it had to be admitted that even the devilish word "pleasure" could quote Scripture on occasions, and quite respectable ones at that. The enjoyment that one got out of the Cynic life, the relish of food and drink and sleep that simple living brought,<sup>20</sup> the delightful sense of fatigue and ease when one came home to one's tub after a hard, healthy day's work, the pleasure of despising pleasure, and the voluptuousness of the feeling of unruffled and purring complacency, could not with any humor or consistency be called bad. Again, if it be true that Diogenes praised justice, as Socrates praised temperance, on the ground that it was a means to mental and even physical pleasure, he was perilously close to the Cyrenaic teaching, which so shocked Antisthenes, and to which we are about to turn, that pleasure is the end pursued by all men and the justification of moral conduct.

Although the bizarre and exaggerated features of Cynicism may have failed to commend its particular doctrines to the world at large, they helped at least to startle the public into an appreciation of some of the possibilities of the new, young actor, Ethics, so lately taken up and introduced upon the stage by Socrates, and to secure for it an increasing *réclame*. The revolt that they advertised so luridly against cut and dried morality and established social, political, and economic institutions could not but make more and more people wonder just what conduct, after all, was right, and what organization of society, after all, was best. Nor were all their revolutionary ideas mere passing fancies. Their attack on slavery and nationalism, their insistence that true worth is no respecter of persons or social distinctions and that true citizenship is not of a particular country but of the world, made them the forerunners of much in Stoic and early Christian social theory. The Stoics were to emphasize cosmopolitanism and assert the

<sup>20</sup> Xen., *Symp.*, IV, 34.



equal citizenship of all human beings, be they emperors or slaves, in the "dear city of Zeus." The Christians were to preach the universal brotherhood of mankind as the children of one Father, whose souls were equal in his sight. To-day, nationalism *vs.* internationalism is still a live and burning issue. Slavery is only just dead. And the Cynic political and economic "heresies" bear a family resemblance to our Communism and Bolshevism.

Moreover, whatever we may think of the revolutionary applications of the Cynic teaching, we cannot deny that it contained much sound, practical doctrine which any age might well take to heart. It is no mean ideal, although it may be a disputable truth, to hold that happiness is something within the reach of all men irrespective of every accident of birth, fortune, and external circumstance, and that no man need be deprived of it by any adversity that fate may bring. Again, the frugal, sturdy rule of life which the Cynics inculcated has much to recommend it, in spite of its grotesque features. It is a valid and needed protest, to-day as yesterday, against over-civilization and too much aestheticism and delicacy on the one hand, and too much hidebound morality and "British respectability" on the other. Its very coarseness and its brutal contempt for polite fictions and white lies, not to speak of other shams and non-essentials, are a well-deserved rebuke to two kinds of people of whom the world is always full—the flabby and super-refined who cannot possibly be happy unless every convenience is at hand, and the prigs and the prudes who oblige virtue as well as truth to go clothed to the ankles in form and convention.

But even the strong points of the Cynic teaching and the sound advice that it gave were bound up with grave weaknesses in the theory upon which they rested. The counsel of independence and self-sufficiency, admirable in itself, was inspired by an individualistic view of human nature which will not bear scrutiny. It is bad psychology, we now feel, to consider the individual man the primitive, basic unit of human life and to regard social relations and organization as derivative and superficial. Mankind is not a chance collection, as it were, of

human atoms, each one of which is turned out complete in itself, fully equipped with every device necessary to carrying on an independent moral career and attaining a special brand of happiness in splendid isolation. It is composed rather of lives each one of which is infinitely divided and scattered among a myriad others and is indistinguishably commingled with them. Human beings are by nature dependent, not independent, both on one another and on the physical environment which produces and fosters them. They are welded solidly into one another's lives and happiness by a thousand mysterious, unbreakable links of interest and sympathy and affection, which far antedate, it would seem, the emergence and semi-detachment of individual self-consciousness, self-love, and private interest. It needs but a panic, a mob, a war, to remind us that our separate personalities are mere *parvenus*, existing only by sufferance and likely to be stampeded at any moment by the old, collective brute passions and instincts of the crowd, with its blind fears and hatreds and violence, its heroisms, its self-sacrifices, its loves than which no man hath greater. In a word, not the particular man but a social organization of some sort is the natural and primitive unit of human life. Institutions are less derivative and superficial growths, if anything, than individuals.

Again, it may be timely and to the point to show man the folly of encumbering his existence with too much moral bric-a-brac, and to exhort him to simpler, more direct, and more natural living; and it may be a real step forward in the shaping of ethical theory to try to find the fundamental needs of human life and base one's rule of conduct and idea of happiness upon them. But the Cynics overdid the distinction between the natural and the artificial, the necessary and the superfluous, when they solemnly clove with it to the very bowels of the moral order and made it the dividing line between good and evil. In doing so, they were, to be sure, quite in the fashion of their day. As we saw when discussing the Sophists, it tickled contemporary Greek thought to oppose things existing "by nature" to things existing by "custom" and "convention," and to attribute to the former a greater importance in human life.

But to the modern eye these distinctions have little significance for ethics.

In the first place it is doubtful whether such a line may be drawn at all, except as a rough and ready classification which, far from indicating any sharp or profound cleavage in things, scarcely scratches their skin. All things are according to nature, as the Stoics were so soon to find out, and the means, which the Cynics would have called "artificial," invented by man for protection, adjustment, survival, and gratification, are really of a piece with the modifications of structure and environment that occur in the give and take between the lower organisms and their surroundings. For example, knife and fork are as "natural" products of evolution as tooth and claw, and Buckingham Palace and the White House are no more "artificial" than a bird's nest or a beaver's dam.

The distinction between the superfluous and the necessary is no less superficial. Man, being an animal that dies or goes mad if put in solitary confinement, needs companionship and mutual aid quite as much as he does food and drink. Being likewise more subtle than any beast of the field, or for that matter than the serpent itself, he is as necessarily possessed of curiosity, ingenuity, and an aesthetic sense, as he is of a stomach, and his craving to explore, exploit, refine, and deck out his wants is no less imperative than his impulse to satisfy them. Moreover—and this, also, the Cynics failed to see—it is just these extra wants and this added touch of subtlety, far more than any peculiarity of conformation, that mark out man from the other anthropoids and entitle him to a genus and a life distinctively human. As well call the bird of Paradise to account for not having the severely simple and unembellished plumage of the crow, or blame the ant for the artificiality of its hill and the nightingale for the needless loveliness of its song, as reprove for being parasitic and superfluous, the comfort and the luxury, the gaiety, the amenity, and the beauty, the forms and the institutions, and all the rest of the furniture of civilization, with which man has adorned and distinguished his life.

In the second place, granting that a clear distinction can



be made between the natural and the artificial, the necessary and the needless, and accepting the line as the Cynics drew it, we may wonder whether the good does not after all lie more often on the side of the unnatural and the superfluous than on that of the natural and the necessary. For ethics, it would seem, is concerned primarily not with what man needs but with what he wants; and the desires that go to shape the vision of happiness far outrun the bare necessities of existence. If, then, we were to attempt to lay down beforehand the nature of the good, we should be inclined to say on general principles that the best life for man, and the life that he naturally desires and needs, would be, not, as the Cynics said, the plainest on which he can subsist, but rather the richest that he can digest. His diet must, of course, be balanced and must include many of the things recommended by the Cynics, such as independence, hardihood, and an even mind proof against misfortune and disappointment. It is a silly and vicious point of view that thinks that human life can be supported on moral sweetmeats and soft drinks. But a man can go to his sleep feeling he has dined better and no less wisely, if a cocktail, *hors d'œuvres*, dessert, and so much champagne as he has the head for, have had a place in his menu. To confine virtue to moral bread and water, not to speak of restricting in any case the good to virtue alone, is a food fad pure and simple in ethics. It is to ignore the omnivorous character of man's moral appetite and digestive apparatus and the complex and highly organized nature of the life that he instinctively craves and feels to be best for him. Cyrenaicism, which allowed for our love of enjoyment and refinement and laid stress upon the tonic effect of pleasure, was in this respect a much more rational and satisfactory theory than Cynicism. It may have fallen perhaps into the opposite extreme when it made pleasure the sole and deliberate end of all moral conduct—as if one should say that man, like a spoiled child, could be coaxed into eating his dinner solely by the hope of the sweets he would get at the end, if only he would eat the rest like a good boy—though this point is still open and debated by moralists. But the Cyrenaics at least looked before they leaped to hasty conclusions about what was best



for man. They studied human nature in a much more liberal and tolerant spirit than did the Cynics, and they consulted man's likes and dislikes before laying down the laws that in their opinion should guide his conduct and ensure his happiness. And even if pleasure is not the only end at which good behavior is aimed, it is indisputably an important object of human desire and a keen incentive to moral action; and the love of it sweetens a goodness that otherwise is apt to be tasteless and unmellowed, and sometimes even acid and distasteful. Let us, then, pass from the Cynic ethics with all its nobility, its severity, its uncouthness, and its downright absurdities, to a further and closer study of the genial Cyrenaic teaching that pleasure is the sole goal and motive of a moral life.

## IV

## THE CYRENAICS

The Cyrenaic doctrine reflects even more strikingly than the Cynic the personality and circumstances of its founder. Straight across from the southernmost promontories of Greece the African coast, as if in answer to those far-away, beckoning Peloponnesian capes, suddenly rises from the midst of league on league of sand-bar and shallow waste of shifting dune, and for a space of a hundred and fifty miles thrusts out into the sea a mass of low, dome-shaped mountains. The more eastern, inferior ranges retain to some degree the barrenness of the embrace of beach and desert from which they spring on the dreary Marmaric shore; and the treeless southern slopes fall away in ever scantier wheatland and pasture to the Libyan sands. But the sea-face of the western mountains was celebrated in ancient times as a veritable garden of the Hesperides. Here the great downs shelved to the Mediterranean in a couple of tablelands, part forest, part open park and grass and rich tillage, furrowed here and there with deep, lush watercourses, and indented at their base with coastal plains of tropical luxuriance. Screened from the hot winds of the desert by the higher crests, and open to the sea-breezes, these northern terraces enjoyed a variety of tempered and equable climates; and as one mounted

from plateau to plateau one passed through every gift of vegetation from tropical groves of date palms to forests of northern oak. All sorts of flowers and fruits and vegetables could be cultivated in abundance, and eight months out of the year were harvest time. So verdant, so lovely, so sudden and gracious in the midst of the melancholy and endless sands, are the terraces of these fair hills, that even to-day they are known to the desert-tribes as Jebel Akdar or the Green Mountain.

Halfway along this smiling coast there is an open bay with good anchorage, sheltered to the east and west by jutting headlands, and backed by a thin strip of plain. Behind, the hills rise sharply, first to a narrow terrace, and then to the broad tableland that caps the range. Here on the edge of the upper plateau, at an elevation of eighteen hundred feet and some ten miles from the Mediterranean, Greek colonists from the island of Thera founded in 631 B. C. the town of Cyrene. And here two hundred years later Aristippus was born.

By that time the original settlement had grown into a rich and splendid city. Its walls and towers, the battlements of its Acropolis, the gleaming marble of its temples and colonnades, floating high in the blue sky above the groves and hanging gardens of the mountain ridge, were a landmark far out to sea. On the shore below, deep in the curve of the bay, lay the busy port of Apollonia, so called by the Cyreneans after the God whose oracle had led them to this promised land. A broad road connected the city with its harbor, descending through a vast necropolis, past the splendid tombs of the dead, to populous and bustling suburbs and lovely orchards and gardens, and so to the sea. Down it wound all the varied wealth of the country for export to the ends of the Mediterranean world. The wharves were piled high with jars of wine and olive-oil and honey, and sacks of wheat and baskets of almonds, dates, figs, and truffles, and every sort of fruit and vegetables. Great heaps of ostrich plumes there were, too, and saffron flowers for the making of delicious perfumes, and the rare and celebrated silphium plant, now extinct,<sup>21</sup> and even at that time found no-

<sup>21</sup> The Italians, however, who now occupy the Cirenaica, believe they have rediscovered this plant.

where else, whose stalks were used as fodder, and whose resinous gum was in much esteem and demand for medicinal purposes with the physicians of antiquity. Or, it might be that some trader was loading his ship with horses of the famous Cyrenean breed, whose victories in the chariot races at Olympia had been sung more than once by Pindar.

Moreover, the Cyreneans could gather in and dispose of the protracted and easy harvest of all this wealth in comparative peace and security. The sea at their feet was one vast market for their wares. Nor could they in their commanding position be easily attacked from it. Their flanks and their rear were covered by the desert, which had so far protected them from all outside interference except one brief moment of incursion and domination by the Persians. They had found no difficulty in keeping the native tribes in order. They had no violence to fear except their own internal disorders, which, although frequent and bloody, do not seem to have interfered seriously with their business or affected their prosperity.

From a people of such easy life and so privileged by nature and by fortune we might expect a certain mellowness and even softness of moral outlook. Nor should we be surprised to hear that by the ancients they were reputed to be pleasure-loving and luxurious. Certainly Aristippus was by nature both. Born of a wealthy family at the moment when Cyrene was at its best and richest, he fell heir to all the advantages and disadvantages that ease and money bring. He seems to have been a genial, clever, sweet-tempered youth, a "good mixer" with every kind of company, very fond of having a good time, and naturally inclined and able to keep pace with the other rather fast young clubmen about town. But he was also intelligent, ingenious, and resourceful, and, though apparently not a man of great courage, he had a presence of mind and quickness of wit that generally enabled him to do the right thing and give the right answer at a critical moment. And his ability to get on well with all sorts of people developed into considerable skill in getting out of them what he wanted. All in all, if to his adaptability, his intellectual gifts, and his talent for managing men, we add a composure of manner and a strength



of mind and will that made him the master rather than the slave of his likes and dislikes, his passions and his prejudices, we may feel that if Aristippus had not become a philosopher he would have made a brilliant diplomat of the old school, and in modern times, at least, would have died an ambassador many times over.

Just when and how he became enamored of philosophy we do not know. Perhaps he was first acquainted with its charms by the Sophists, who can scarcely have omitted so choice and plump a plum as Cyrene from their pickings. In any case their doctrine must have been current there, for the well-known mathematician Theodorus, who was one of the intellectual lights of the city and later a teacher of Plato, was a friend of Protagoras. And when Aristippus came to develop his own system he showed a strong leaning towards the Protagorean teaching. From Theodorus, too, who was also a friend of Socrates', he doubtless heard of the stir raised at Athens by the latter's teachings.

But it seems to have been during a visit to the Olympic games that Aristippus' fate was sealed. There, we are told, he heard from a friend a full account of Socrates' personality and teaching, by which he was so ravished that he could scarcely wait to get to Athens and see and hear for himself so delightful and interesting a man. The meeting made of him a confirmed philosopher and one of Socrates' most devoted followers, and he was quickly received into the little circle of the more intimate friends and companions. He was, however, absent in Aegina at the time of the trial, and for some reason did not hasten back, as we should have expected of so close a disciple, to say farewell to his master and stand by him till the last.

After the execution Aristippus lived on for a time at Aegina. But during his discipleship he seems to have begun to teach on his own account, and it is even said, though the account is not altogether trustworthy, that he had already scandalized his fellow-pupils by following the Sophists' custom of asking fees for his instruction, and by offering a portion of his earnings to Socrates himself. However that may be, it was not long before he adopted the Sophists' mode of life, taking to the



road, teaching as he went, and charging his pupils five hundred to a thousand drachmas per head.<sup>22</sup> These sums were a pleasant increase to his inherited wealth and satisfied an interest in adding to his income to which he frankly confessed. Restless and cosmopolitan by nature, and with little attachment to any particular spot, he wandered for some years, establishing himself in one place after another only to move on. We hear of him, although we should not perhaps believe all we hear, at Megara and Corinth, and in Asia Minor and Sicily. Gossip has it that he visited the court of Dionysius at Syracuse, where he was shown every discourtesy by the tyrant, to which he retorted with some of the best of his many *bons mots*. He is also said on this occasion to have had a tiff with Plato, who earlier in his career had taken on the unenviable job of tutoring the thirty-year-old, but quite uneducated Dionysius to reign in his father's stead, and was for the moment again in Sicily trying to patch up a quarrel between the tyrant and his uncle and quasi-guardian, Dion. Little reliance, however, can be placed in these tales. Finally, Aristippus went back to Cyrene and set up a school of philosophy. Presumably from that time on he made his native town his headquarters, and eventually died there. But of that, as of the date of his death, we know nothing for certain.

It is traditional that the Ethiopian cannot change his skin or the leopard his spots, and however much Aristippus' mind may have been developed and his interests crystallized by his friendship with Socrates, his character was little modified. He underwent none of the moral and almost religious conversion that appears, as we shall presently see, to have occurred in Plato. He was born a man of the world, a man about town, a good fellow who loved a good time, and these genial and *mondain* traits he carried with him to the grave, if we may believe the many racy anecdotes about his pleasantries and gallantries. A nature more unlike Antisthenes' it would be difficult to imagine, and it bears witness to the inclusive personality and the inconclusive teaching of Socrates that two men, so opposite in character and conviction, should have found in him

<sup>22</sup> About \$100 to \$200.

a concrete model and a philosophic justification for such divergent ways of meeting and dealing with life.

And Aristippus, it might seem, had as much right on his side as Antisthenes. For Socrates, despite the strictness, the inner aloofness, and the robust independence and self-sufficiency upon which the Cynics had seized, enjoyed life thoroughly, accepted gladly its invitations, dined and wined gaily if discreetly at its board, and generally made the most and the best of all it had to offer. He was never awkward and uncertain of himself in the company of pleasure, never, like Antisthenes, turned red and shocked, and wished himself anywhere else, and even mad. He was, rather, always sympathetic, graceful, thoroughly at ease, a good listener to its claims. It was this general willingness to associate with the ordinary amusements and pleasures that come in a man's way, this gaiety, this power of enjoyment, this lack of moral snobbery, upon which Aristippus fastened as the true result and justification of Socrates' rule of conduct and the key to virtue and happiness in general. Socrates was a living example of how to be good though happy. His independence, his serenity, and his imperturbable content had been won, not by shunning pleasure and affecting a callous insensibility to external circumstances, as that sour Puritan of an Antisthenes so foolishly thought, but, on the contrary, by being so interested in everything that went on, so broad and deep in his power of getting pleasure from common things, that, whatever happened, there was always enough left to enjoy and be content with.

But it was not merely Socrates' personality that seemed to show that goodness and the enjoyment of pleasure might go hand in hand. Much in his teaching gave support to such a view. There were times, we may remember, when he seemed to cut loose for a moment from the vicious circle involved in defining virtue as knowledge of the good, and to realize that the question "What is the good of being virtuous?" was still pressing for an answer. And so far as it did occur to him that virtue might not be an end in itself, but had to be justified as the necessary means to some higher goal, he seemed inclined to find this goal in the increased pleasurable-ness of life ensured,

in his opinion, by good behavior. For instance, Xenophon, there is some reason to believe, wrote his recollections for the express purpose of whitewashing his master from the charges of being irreligious and a bad moral influence.<sup>23</sup> But strait-laced, pious, and Mid-Victorian as he was, he did not blush to represent Socrates as praising continence and temperance on the ground that they kept the capacity for enjoyment fresh, keen, and unjaded, and as saying that the goodness of virtue in general lay in the fact that its practice gave more pleasure than did that of vice.<sup>24</sup>

These suggestions, vague, tentative, and incomplete as they were on Socrates' part, were a revelation to Aristippus of the true nature of morality. Like Antisthenes, he believed that he was the only one who really understood his master. Nothing could be clearer than Socrates' real meaning. The better you were, the better time you had; and conversely the better time you were having, the better you were. Every action was really aimed at the attainment of pleasure, and morality was nothing but the ordering of one's life in such wise that one might always enjoy it.

In his new gospel, Aristippus was quick to draw material from every side, even out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. It did not need the wise man, reflecting upon the meaning of happiness and carefully analyzing the motives behind his conduct, to discover that what all men sought, consciously or unconsciously, was pleasure. The fact was plain to every infant and for that matter to every animal. The pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain were only too obviously the two great driving and controlling forces in the behavior of all sentient beings from the moment of their birth. Pleasure, then, was the normal and instinctive good, the good established and indicated by Nature for all her creatures. Let Antisthenes prate about a man's living a simple, normal, natural, and healthy life. Very well! What could be more simple, more normal, more natural, and more healthy, than to obey the most fundamental and imperative dictate of Nature and seek enjoyment? Not to seek it was a sign, not of virtue, but of a perverted and un-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 70.



natural character. Antisthenes' wish, Aristippus might have claimed, had already been granted, and he was already out of his right mind when he had cried out that he had rather go mad than experience pleasure.

In developing their theory that the good is pleasure, the Cyrenaics, like the Cynics, were influenced by the psychology and theory of knowledge of the Sophists. Metaphysics and science they dismissed, like Antisthenes, on the ground that all attempts to investigate the nature of things, such as the older philosophers had made, were aimed at a knowledge that cannot be attained. But logic, they felt, had some bearing upon problems of moral conduct. Their study of logic and psychology, however, led them to give an extra turn of the screw, if anything, to the Protagorean doctrine that "man is the measure of all things." It was not merely that all things were, as the Sophists declared, in such bewildering Heracleitean flux and change that their true nature could not be grasped, and that therefore what appeared to each individual to be true of them was absolute truth, so far as he was concerned. The very term "thing" or "object" was now also taboo. All that we can know, the Cyrenaics said, is our own sensations and feelings. Of any world outside our individual experiences we can have no knowledge whatsoever—not even the knowledge that it is in such Heracleitean flux that it can never be known. The change that we perceive going on about us is nothing but change in our sensations, not change in an external object of any sort.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, pleasure is just the smooth, pain, the rough and stormy, passage of our feelings; and when there is, as it were, a dead calm, and the movement of our sensations is unnoticed, we are in a state of indifference.<sup>26</sup> So far, then, as the problems of knowledge and moral conduct are concerned, the existence of an objective universe must be absolutely ignored. Each man's sensations and feelings compose for him the only world with which he can acquaint himself and from which he can draw good or evil.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

<sup>26</sup> Euseb., *Praep. Ev.*, XIV, 18, 32. Diog. Laert., II, viii, 7, § 86, quoted by Zeller, *Socrates*, etc., p. 300, note 2.



The implications of this doctrine for logic made the Cyrenaics even more "nominalistic" than the Cynics in their views regarding the contentious question of the existence and validity of class-concepts and general forms, so bitterly disputed between Antisthenes and Plato. The Cynics, we remember, had reduced the common natures in which particular objects seemingly share to empty names founded upon chance and superficial resemblances, which corresponded to nothing really existent and conveyed no knowledge of the things they were applied to. The Cyrenaics, however, pushed on to a more advanced position, summoning to their aid arguments like those employed by Protagoras and Gorgias. When, for example, you and I apply the same name to our sensations, and agree that this is white and that is sweet, we presuppose at least that our sensations are alike. For, obviously, if our sensations have nothing in common, it is misleading and absurd to apply a common name to them. But what grounds have we for supposing that the experiences of different individuals have anything in common? None. They have, so far as we can see, no common object or cause outside themselves to make them similar. And no one individual can penetrate another's mind to see whether the sensations that he finds there are similar to his own. A man can feel only his own feelings; he cannot feel those of his fellows. I can therefore no more ascertain what your feelings are like—what, for example, you really are feeling when you utter the words "white" or "sweet"—than I can what an external world would be like. For that matter, a color-blind person would appear to see "red," not as you see it, but as you see "grey-green." But certainly our voices have no right even to breathe in the same way, and utter the same word, for the purpose of expressing sensations and feelings whose difference or likeness we have no means of testing. When, then, you and I apply the same name or class-concept to a couple of items, one of which is shut up in your experience, the other in mine, we are pretending to a knowledge that we can never possess. In a word, not only are common natures non-existent, as the Cynics said, but common names are without a common ground, however superficial, of any sort. The general term,

the Platonic Form, has no more foundation in fancy than in fact.

The Cyrenaics' application of the dictum "man is the measure of all things" to the field of ethics was no less straightforward and thoroughgoing than it was to that of logic. Since we can know nothing of our sensations we must deal with the goodness of pleasure on the basis of feeling alone. What *feels* good *is* good. Ethics, like the theory of knowledge, knows nothing of an external law or order which might introduce considerations other than those of sensation into our estimate of the goodness of pleasure.

Again, since no man can feel another's feelings and know what his neighbor's sensations of pleasure are like, there can be no comparison of pleasure among individuals, and hence no basis for a universal agreement as to which pleasures are most pleasurable, and therefore best, for all. Nor is it permissible to distinguish between pleasures as higher and lower, better and worse, according to the sources from which they spring. In the first place, there is no valid psychological ground for contrasting the sources of pleasure. We may not oppose, except perhaps superficially, so-called "spiritual" pleasures to bodily enjoyment. For all pleasure is a feeling, and all feelings have to do with the body.<sup>27</sup> The "highest" pleasures are, so to speak, nothing but shivers up and down one's spine. And secondly, there is no ethical ground for any such contrast. The goodness of pleasure is an intrinsic value. It has nothing to do with the kind of thing from which the pleasure is drawn. A flower, we might say by way of example, is none the less beautiful for being grown in a dung-heap; nay more, it may be lovelier than one grown in the whitest and purest sand. In like manner, the Cyrenaics would argue, a pleasure is no less good for being grounded in something vulgarly accounted base or absurd.<sup>28</sup> All sources of enjoyment are, without distinction, sources of an equally good life, provided that they give equal pleasure. Wherever we turn,

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert., II, viii, 8, § 87, Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>28</sup> Diog. Laert., II, viii, 8, § 88. Cf. Plato, *Philebus*, 12 D, 13 A; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

then, we find no trustworthy standard for judging the goodness of a pleasure except its pleasurable to the individual who is feeling it. Each man is the measure of the life that he enjoys most; in other words, of the life that is morally best for him.

But now, even when we have located the good in the pleasure of the individual, and have bidden each individual judge the moral value of his acts without reference to any external order, natural or social, and solely by their pleasurable to him alone, we have not solved the real moral problem. For even the pleasure of the individual, when freed from all outer complications, is not a simple thing all of the same complexion and texture. It is not one but many, and extremely plural at that. We must speak of a man's pleasures rather than of his pleasure, and these pleasures are a motley crew, different in kind, and often at odds with one another. Some are preceded by unrest and rasping desire—as, for example, a drink after too prolonged a thirst—or are followed by an enervating feeling of satiety; others come and go without painful prelude or disagreeable after-effects. Furthermore, they crowd and even stifle one another in their rush and press for satisfaction, and force their pursuer to pick and choose between them.

If, then, the individual is to take pleasure as his mark with any hope of success, he must first decide what kind of pleasure is the most pleasurable, and how far its value may perhaps be offset by the price he has to pay for it. Had he better sacrifice intensity to durability, or take the cash and let the credit go? Is or is not this particular enjoyment worth working for? Are its consequences likely to make it really worth while? Or does it warrant him in taking the chances and putting himself to considerable pains? Again, granting that two pleasures seem equally keen or lasting and alike in their preliminaries and consequences, which shall he choose, if he cannot have both? Unless a man makes allowance for these considerations in taking aim at the good, and is sure that he has picked the best target in the herd of pleasures bearing down upon him, his shot is almost sure to go wild and he to come to grief, trampled under foot by a confusion of joys.



Aristippus, however, stood his ground, and his answer rang out sharp and short. The good, he said, is to be found in the pleasure of the moment alone. It has "nothing to do either with the recollection of past enjoyments or with the hope of future ones."<sup>29</sup> The present pleasure is the only pleasure really felt. Past and future pleasures cannot concern us, since the past are no longer in existence and the future have not yet come into being.<sup>30</sup> Had we reminded Aristippus of memory at this point, he would doubtless have replied that remembering a pleasure does not bring it back, and that the images and enjoyments of memory are nothing compared to the vividness of present feelings. And as to the pleasures of anticipation, so far as they are felt, they are present—but how faint they look in comparison with those actually being enjoyed here and now! Moreover, why waste one's time enjoying the prospect of something that, given the unreliability of events, may never occur? Gambling in future pleasures involves too great a risk. To-day should never be sacrificed to the morrow. The truly wise man will make hay while the sun shines, seizing every pleasure as it comes to hand, careless of its origin and past. Nor, in theory at least, ought he to worry too much about consequences, since he cannot know with any certainty what they will be like.

The drift of Aristippus' argument must now be plain. Durability, being an unknown factor, can play no part in determining the goodness of a pleasure. Immediacy and intensity are the only gauges left. Again, since the most available and the most intense pleasures happen generally to be those of the "senses," the pleasures of the senses are better than those, so called, of the mind.

This conclusion, although it may seem far-fetched and impractical, is a logical and unavoidable deduction from the Sophistic premises on which Aristippus took his stand. The same reasons as prevent one man from knowing another's experience prevent him also from knowing anything but the present moment in his own. For I can no more feel directly my

<sup>29</sup> Athenaeus, XII, 544 (trans. Yonge).

<sup>30</sup> Athenaeus, *loc. cit.* (trans. Yonge).



own past and future sensations than I can your sensations. No amount of remembering or anticipating can make them present experiences, just as no amount of guessing what you feel can bring me into immediate contact with your feelings. Indeed, for all I can certainly know, I may have had no past. My feeling here and now that I have had one may be nothing but an illusion of the present moment. And the like may be the case with the future. In other words, just as the hammer of Protagorean logic smashed the social order to disconnected, individual bits, so it went on to pulverize the life of the individual into scattered, unrelated present moments, each one of which had to be judged on its own immediate merits so far as its goodness as well as its truth was concerned.

But the Cyrenaics were as little able as the Sophists to put their teaching into force. In theory, a man's life might be nothing but a lot of independent instants; in practice, it turned out to be a career in which the future was largely influenced by the present. The future consequences of the present pleasure or pain had, then, to be taken into account by the individual in estimating its goodness or badness for him. Though nothing could destroy the intrinsic worth of an immediate satisfaction, nevertheless the suffering that seemed likely to follow might outweigh its value, and turn it, when all was said and done, from a good into an evil. In like manner, a present pain might be worth enduring because it was more than offset by the future pleasure to which it led. This the Cyrenaics admitted. But in so doing they gave away their case. For the consequences of a pleasure are not confined to the internal, private results produced upon the individual who enjoys it. The effects that it produces upon his neighbors, who do not share his enjoyment, also recoil upon him. And the social consequences and penalties are far more formidable, as a rule, than the petty personal revenge taken by an overstrained organism. For instance, if I drink too much I shall doubtless pay for my pleasure by being sick; but, what is worse, I run the risk of paying a fine or being jailed. It is other people, that is, who complicate the moral problem for me. If I could ignore them and take only myself into account when figuring consequences, the diffi-

culty of being good would almost disappear. The Cyrenaics, then, when they began to talk of results as well as intrinsic values, found themselves willy-nilly reconstructing a moral order and setting up an objective moral standard. They still recognized, to be sure, that nothing is "naturally and intrinsically just or honourable or disgraceful," and that such distinctions are altogether matters of mere law and custom. But they now added that "the good man will do nothing out of the way because of the punishments which are imposed upon, and the discredit which is attached to such actions."<sup>31</sup>

The Cyrenaics back-watered, too, when they approached the topic of physical and mental "pleasures." The psychology of pleasure proved too complicated for them. They confused the things we enjoy with the enjoyment we take in them, and were not sure that the enjoyment of a tragedy or of the prosperity of something other than oneself, as for instance one's country, could be explained on the supposition that pleasure is a purely physical sensation.<sup>32</sup> Morally, also, they admitted that when consequences and circumstances had been taken into account, "mental" pleasure was often in point of all round goodness equal, if not superior, to "bodily" satisfaction.

Again, the admission that the consequences of a pleasure had some bearing upon its goodness introduced the factor of intelligence into morality. The problem of moral conduct became the problem of nicely weighing the present against the future, and of knowing how much antecedent or resultant pain, if pain there must be, a given pleasure was worth. This required a quickness of wit, a breadth of vision, and a depth of insight, such as philosophy was best calculated to foster. Wisdom and philosophy, then, were necessary to virtue, and it was the wisest men, or the philosophers, who naturally led the pleasantest, and therefore the best life. At this point, it will be noted, the Cyrenaics had really returned to the teaching that virtue is knowledge of what is good. But they also thought that they knew what the good was—which was more than Socrates had found out—and thus they broke through the

<sup>31</sup> Diog. Laert., II, viii, 10, 97 (trans. Yonge).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, II, viii, 8, §§ 89, 90.

vicious circle in which the Socratic doctrine had revolved, and supplemented its inconclusiveness with a definite, scientifically argued conclusion.

The precept and example of Aristippus and his immediate disciples also belied the far-fetched character of their original doctrine, and were, if anything, more edifying than those of the Cynics. Like the latter, the early Cyrenaics preached independence of spirit, freedom from the bonds of religion, a cosmopolitan superiority to political and social ties, a generous indifference to wealth, and cheerfulness, self-control, and equanimity, in all circumstances. But their practice of these virtues, tempered as it was by a different and perhaps sounder point of view, was never marked by the eccentricities and exaggerations in which the Cynics delighted. They prized intelligence and education, the amenities and refinements of existence, and ease and beauty of external circumstance, and understood how dependent life is upon them for its full fruition. They accepted the world as they found it, and tried, not to reform it, but to get the most out of it as it stood. Institutions, laws, forms, conventions, prejudices might be as immaterial and artificial as the Cynics said, and the philosopher would not be fooled or cowed by them. Still, there they were, and it was the part of the wise man to be able in his freedom to adapt himself to them with good-natured tolerance and turn them to his uses, rather than to rise in surly and ill-considered revolt. It may be, indeed, that the Cyrenaics were untrue to the moderation that they advocated, and luxuriated over-much in an easy-going, non-reforming, exploiting attitude. But the perfumes, the fine clothes, and the mistresses with which Aristippus was reproached<sup>33</sup> were no more extravagant than the rags, the dirt, and the promiscuity advocated by Antisthenes. Nor should it be forgotten that the Cynics enjoined as a virtue a laxity in sexual relations—provided of course that one took no pleasure in them—quite as great as that which the Cyrenaics considered it possible to enjoy in a pleasant and well-lived life.

At the death of Aristippus the leadership of his School passed to his daughter Arete, and from her to her son, who

<sup>33</sup> Athenaeus, XII, 63, 544.



bore his grandfather's name. Of the later members of the School we may briefly mention Theodorus, Hegesias, and Anniceris. The doctrines of Theodorus showed that to take the consequences of a pleasure into account in estimating its goodness did not alter the logic of the situation. For, if pleasure is the good, and if all that we have to reckon with besides its intrinsic value is its consequences, a man has only to avoid evil results to himself in order to make whatever pleases him right. If, for example, he enjoys thieving and is in a position to steal with impunity, theft is his good, and none can say him nay. Hence "a wise man may steal, and commit adultery, and sacrilege, at proper seasons: for that none of these actions is disgraceful by nature, if one can put out of sight the common opinion about them which owes its existence to the consent of fools."<sup>34</sup> Religion, like popular morality, was in Theodorus' eyes an opinion dependent upon a like consent, and he attacked Gods of every shape and description with a vigor that won for him the title of "atheist" and all but got him into serious difficulties at Athens.<sup>35</sup> We ought also to remark that he pushed the doctrines of self-sufficiency and cosmopolitanism to the extent of declaring that even such a general and international social relation as friendship was unnecessary, except as a temporary means to some higher, self-centred end.<sup>36</sup>

Theodorus, however, proved to be something of a sheep in wolf's clothes, after all. To him, as to the Apostle Paul, all things were lawful but some were not expedient. Far from availing himself of the privileges of the wise man, he made much of the virtues of prudence and justice,<sup>37</sup> and complained that the pupils who found his teachings subversive misunderstood him, taking, to use his own expression, with their left hands what he had given with his right.<sup>38</sup> He also insisted no less strongly than Aristippus on the part played by intelligence in securing a pleasant life; and the importance he attached to it, together with his almost Cynic enthusiasm for

<sup>34</sup> Diog. Laert., II, viii, 13, § 99 (trans. Yonge).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, II, viii, 15, § 101.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, II, viii, 13, § 98.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Plutarch, *De Tranq. Anim.*, 5.



self-sufficiency, led him to modify very considerably the doctrine that the good lies in pleasure. For the pleasure of the moment he substituted general joyfulness of disposition which could be reached by the use of intelligence, whatever external circumstances might be like, and which could be maintained, even when one was in pain, by the exercise of a little philosophy and common sense. In this teaching that the good lies in a frame of mind rather than a feeling, and that the wise and virtuous man is indifferent to outer conditions, Theodorus seems both to veer towards the Cynics and to anticipate the views of his contemporary, the founder of the Epicurean School.

By Hegesias Cyrenaicism was given a new and unexpected twist. He started firmly enough with the orthodox opinion that the good lies in pleasure and pleasure only, and that even seemingly spontaneous feelings like gratitude, friendship, and beneficence spring from the desire to get all that one can for oneself. But now, if life is aimed at pleasure, it is forever missing its mark and defeating its own end. The body is afflicted with many sensations, painful as well as pleasurable, and "the soul feels with the body and is troubled, and fortune brings to naught many of our hopes; wherefore happiness does not exist."<sup>39</sup> The highest good, then, that one can hope for is not pleasure but freedom from pain.<sup>40</sup> And this more modest goal can be reached only by cultivating so utter an indifference to all that life brings that one does not even care whether one lives or dies.<sup>41</sup> Nay more, since we are generally frustrated, whatever good we seek, and since there is far more suffering than there is enjoyment in the world, we may argue that the sooner we are dead the better. This teaching got Hegesias the nickname of "Death's Advocate," and apparently he urged it with an eloquence that outdid even Crates' feat of converting his brother-in-law. For, Cicero tells us, "he is said to have been forbid by Ptolemy<sup>42</sup> from delivering his lectures in the

<sup>39</sup> Diog. Laert., II, viii, 9, § 94 (trans. Yonge).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, II, viii, 9, § 96.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, II, viii, 9, §§ 94-95.

<sup>42</sup> Ptolemy I, Alexander's general, who seized Egypt after his master's death, and made himself king. Hegesias apparently was sojourning at Alexandria.

schools because some who heard him made away with themselves."<sup>43</sup>

By this pessimistic and almost Cynic road Hegesias and his followers returned to the Socratic doctrine that no one ever does evil intentionally. And this they suffused with an atmosphere of compassion, curiously Buddhistic and Christian in feeling. Wrong-doers should be forgiven because they know not what they do. They are passive objects, the victims of circumstances beyond their control. One should not hate them but should try to teach them better.<sup>44</sup>

Anniceris, however, was much more cheerful in his outlook on life, and, like Aristippus, thought that the good could still be found in the pleasure of the individual moment. There was no such thing, in his opinion, as an end at which one's life as a whole was aimed, but each separate act had its particular goal which lay in the enjoyment resulting from it.<sup>45</sup> He perceived nevertheless what the other Cyrenaics had failed to see—that man is instinctively a social animal, and that the welfare of others may be as immediate a cause of pleasure to him as his own sensations.<sup>46</sup> Hence he opposed the theory of the self-sufficiency and cosmopolitanism of the wise man, held by Aristippus and the other branches of Cyrenaicism, and maintained that such things as "friendship and gratitude, and honoring one's parents, and doing one's bit for one's country," had a place in life, not only because of their personal advantage to the individual, but because they expressed and satisfied the "innate benevolence" with which every human being was naturally endowed.<sup>47</sup> These views are curiously and prophetically like those of modern Utilitarianism, of which, as a matter of fact, Anniceris may be regarded as the remote progenitor. Again, it was in line with the same train of thought to feel that the rôle of intelligence in moral conduct ought not to be unduly exalted. Reason, he felt, is not so authoritative as to justify

<sup>43</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.*, I, 34 (trans. Yonge).

<sup>44</sup> Diog. Laert., II, viii, 9, § 95.

<sup>45</sup> Clement Strom., ii, 417 B, quoted by Zeller, *Socrates*, etc., p. 329, note 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 417, quoted by Zeller, *Socrates*, etc., p. 330, note 2.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert., II, x, 96, 97.

one in being absolutely self-confident in setting one's private judgment above general opinion.<sup>48</sup>

In tracking the later Cyrenaics we have overstepped somewhat our epoch. Before they died, indeed, the theory that pleasure is the good was receiving a new and more famous formulation at the hands of Epicurus, whose system lies beyond the scope of the present volume. Let us then retrace our steps, and, before turning to Plato, audit the Cyrenaic accounts and summarize the chapter on the development of philosophy with which we have been dealing. To begin with, we may credit Aristippus with being the first to give a reasoned, scientific account of the nature of the good, founded upon a deliberate and unbiased observation of human nature. Again, his conclusion that the good is pleasure makes him the father of all the "hedonistic" theories, which have played so imposing a part in the history of ethics, and still challenge denial in their modern form of Utilitarianism. New vistas, also, not only in ethics but in psychology were opened by the conviction of which, to be sure, the Cyrenaics did not always have the courage, that, whatever the source of a pleasure might be, the seat of it was the body, and that therefore the distinction, still popular to-day, between "physical" and "mental" or "spiritual" pleasures was mere rhetoric. No matter what we enjoy, we might say, be it a kiss, a good dinner, the contemplation of beauty, the discovery of truth, or the Beatific Vision itself, the enjoyment itself is an organic disturbance more or less definitely located, and even in the most "spiritual" cases lying in a certain catching of the breath, creeping of the backbone, and glowing and coursing of the blood. The Cyrenaics, then, were not so far from the modern theory, of which William James was one of the originators, that the emotions, instead of preceding and exciting their characteristic bodily expressions, are really the feeling of the physical changes in the muscles, viscera, respiratory system, etc., that take place spontaneously and immediately in the presence of the disturbing stimulus. For instance, I do not run away because I am afraid, but my fear is my feeling of my running and of the other organic re-

<sup>48</sup> Diog. Laert., II, x, 96.



actions in scalp, heart, pit of the stomach, and the like, inspired by the fearsome object.

Finally, the limit to which Aristippus pushed his hedonism in declaring that the good is the pleasure of the moment helps throw into bold relief the fact that, unless one invokes some supernatural reason to the contrary, pleasure of any sort and from any source is always *intrinsically* a good, and that whatever evil may happen to be associated with it is incidental to its results and not to the enjoyment of the sensation itself. The stress on the moment, likewise, excessive though it may be, is a salutary correction to the opposite and equally extreme view that the whole value of the present lies in the hope that it is preparing one for pleasure in the future. Thus, unlimited Cyrenaicism may safely be administered, until the symptoms cease, to the tired business man who is always waiting to enjoy life after he retires; or to the Puritan who grimly, and with a great air of virtue, eschews all pleasure here below, the better to taste heavenly bliss; or even to the over-practical boy who regards his youth as a mere preparation for his "real life," and cannot imagine himself pursuing any subject at school or college except in so far as it seems to him a means to a distant success in years that, after all, may never come. In a word, the good is not something that is reached only at the end of a career, but rather something that is being continuously realized throughout a whole life-time. The only end of a life that does not attain its end from day to day is death.

So much for the credit side of the sheet. We turn now to the items to be charged against Cyrenaicism. The most formidable of these to the popular eye is the alleged immorality of the teaching. This objection, however, is not intelligent and will not bear scrutiny. It does not take much pondering to discover the lack of weight in the argument that a thing cannot be true because, if it were, it would shock some moral interest or sensibility. The constitution of the universe, whatever it may be, displays little regard for human susceptibilities and prejudices, and plenty of truths exist that woefully confuse our conduct and thwart a morally ideal life.



But in the case of a theory of ethics the argument is nothing short of light-minded. For it is difficult to see how any truth about morals can be subversive to morality, or how any sound conclusions as to what is bad can be reached before we know what the good really is. And it is only in the light of such knowledge that we can decide who is right and who is wrong. Hence an ethical theory cannot be condemned beforehand on the score that it is prejudicial to good conduct, or be brought to trial on any count save that of its possible falsity. There is, then, no sense or use in denouncing a moral system as immoral until we have investigated its claim to be true; and if we find reasonable grounds for disallowing this claim, further vituperation of its demerits is superfluous. On the other hand, if the available evidence supports it, and validates, say, the hypothesis that the good is pleasure, then it is not the adherents, but the enemies of the theory, who are attacking morality and corrupting society by subversive teaching.

Now if we challenge Cyrenaicism on the only ground that it can be challenged, that is, on the ground of its truth, and examine its case without prejudice and hysteria, we shall find some reason for believing that the spring and end of moral activity may, after all, not be the pleasure of the moment or even the greatest amount of pleasure in the long run. The mystic, for instance, may be right, and all pleasures may be the bonds of corruption by which an immortal soul is buried in the flesh, as in a prison or a tomb, and kept from the true felicity of reunion with the divine. Or perhaps the reasoning of the Puritan is correct, and the world in all its beauty and the body with its subtle delights were created expressly that the soul, by resisting their allurements and putting them behind her, might discipline herself to glorify God only, and make herself worthy of enjoying him forever. But we do not need to appeal to such arguments, which, after all, are cogent only if the highly disputable theological and metaphysical systems upon which they are based be true. In the next chapter we shall find Plato bringing forward less far-fetched reasons why pleasure should not be the good; and, when we come to Aristotle, we shall have to deal with a careful and scientifically

worked-out system of ethics, based upon a minute observation of human nature, in which the claim of pleasure to be the motive and end of the moral life is vigorously combatted. In spite, then, of its appeal to common sense and of the well weighed and marshalled evidence that the Epicureans and the various modern systems of Hedonism and Utilitarianism have brought forward in its support, we shall do well not to assent to the pleasure theory until we have had a chance to review it in the light of the Platonic and Aristotelian objections.

There remains a final difficulty to be written down against Cyrenaicism. The individualism that Aristippus, like Antisthenes, inherited from the Sophists led him and all his followers except Anniceris into an error which we have already discussed at length in connection with the Cynics. They felt that man was essentially a self-sufficient rather than a social animal, and therefore considered the particular man to be the primary and basic unit in human life and gave a derivative and subordinate place to our social inclinations, affections, activities, and institutions. They did not, to be sure, go to the Cynic extreme of rejecting the whole structure of society as an artificial and unnecessary hindrance to a virtuous life; but they only valued it in so far as it subserved the interests and ministered to the pleasures of the individual. Hence we find in Cyrenaicism, though to a less marked degree, the same exaggerated cosmopolitanism, the same superiority to law, institution, and public opinion, the same disparagement of patriotism, devotion to the state, family affection, and social ties as characterized the Cynics. Anniceris alone, as we remarked, saw the primary nature of man's gregarious instinct and of the pleasures that spring from it, and thereby made a most important and far-reaching contribution to the perspective of Hedonism.

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We will now cast a last glance back over the field that we have just been traversing. Socrates, we saw, for all his great work in setting up ethics as a major subject of philosophy, left no clear indication as to what he meant by the good. To answer

this question became the all-absorbing interest of several of his disciples.

Euclid of Megara, who had been in his earlier days a follower of Parmenidean doctrine, offered as his solution an amalgamation of Socratic and Eleatic doctrine. By the good, he thought, Socrates had meant something that might be identified with the Eleatic One. The two things, in his eyes, seemed made and meant for each other. Parmenides had reduced the One to an almost abstract form with no tangible properties save perhaps solidity and sphericity. Socrates had discovered a simple principle for the several virtues, and had perhaps reduced all forms that mattered in his opinion to one—the Form of the Good—endowed with the simplicity, the universality, and the unchangeableness of Eleatic Being. Only endow the One in its turn with goodness and forget about its roundness and solidity, and the match was made. Reflection, however, showed us that a One or a Good as undefined as Parmenides and Socrates had left them had little valuable to bestow upon each other, and that their union was not a fruitful one for ethics. The question “What is the good?” left unanswered by Socrates, remained, to all practical intents and purposes, unanswered at Euclid’s hands.

We also found among the Megarics a keen interest in logic, which showed itself partly in the invention of puzzles and catches, and partly in a reproduction of the Eleatic paradoxes directed against the existence of the Many.

Unlike Euclid, the founders of the Cynic and Cyrenaic Schools were not originally metaphysicians, but on the contrary were bred in a profound distrust of the “useless” investigations and results of speculation and physical science. Antisthenes started his philosophic career as a Sophist, and Aristippus was educated under Protagorean influences. Their later association with Socrates intensified, if anything, their practical point of view, and led them to confine their inquiry into the nature of the good entirely to the field of ethics.

Antisthenes took it from Socrates that virtue is one and the same for all, that it consists in knowledge of what is best for a man, and that no man who knows what is best for him



will voluntarily act against his interests or, in other words, do evil. By the Sophists he had already been convinced that each individual was the only measure of his own interests and good. Putting two and two together, he concluded that every man was capable of being wholly virtuous and happy in and by himself. Only leave a man to himself and to the dictates of his own reason, and he would spontaneously do the right thing. Evil and unhappiness were due entirely to the influence upon the mind of outer circumstances, among which were to be reckoned the passions, and particularly the seduction of pleasure and the fear of pain. Moral training, then, consisted in steeling the character to self-sufficiency. Once this was secured, with its consequent independence on external circumstances and indifference to pleasure and pain, happiness was a matter of course. In a word, virtue was its own reward, and was to be cultivated for its own sake.

The Cynics were confirmed in this interpretation of Socrates' teaching by the example of his life. They seized upon his frugality, his cheerful poverty, his independence, his unconventionality, his courage and even-mindedness, as the qualities *par excellence* of a good life, and sought to fashion their own behavior after these characteristics.

In application the Cynics' doctrine would have been, we found, exceedingly radical and anarchistic. Human society, as they saw it, was a wholly unnecessary and artificial growth which had made men interdependent on one another, not independent, and encouraged their leaning on supports that might give way at a moment's notice and at a turn of the wheel of fortune. If, then, self-sufficiency, virtue, and happiness—and these three were one—were to be restored to fallen humanity, there was nothing for it but to raze society to the ground. There must be an end to the ties, institutions, forms, and amenities, such as family, state, church, property, wealth, and all the rest, that had destroyed the normal simplicity of human life and smothered the direct and natural satisfaction of a few primitive and unescapable wants beneath a parasitic mass of complications and refinements. An entirely fresh start had to be made, in which co-operation, interdependence,



and dalliance with material adjuncts were reduced to the minimum compatible with the barest requirements of food, shelter, and the reproduction of the species. The Cynics tried to show by their own doctrine what this perfectly simple and virtuous life, unperverted by civilization, would be like. And the picturesque figures of Antisthenes, Diogenes, and Crates, with their rags, their tubs, their beggar's bowls, their calm ignoring of all convention and authority, and their performance upon the house-top of everything that is usually relegated to the chamber or the closet, are probably sufficiently vivid in our memories to need no re-sketching.

The Cyrenaics, we saw, took quite a different view of Socrates' meaning and of life in general. Aristippus, the leader of the School, by nature a genial, pleasure-loving man of the world, was born in the easiest of circumstances in a city famous in antiquity for its luxurious atmosphere. Turned disciple of Socrates, he was perhaps attracted by his master's tolerance, mellowness, sociability, gaiety, and power of enjoyment, which doubtless seemed to him the fruits of a teaching that, so far as it in any way indicated the good of which virtue is the knowledge, seemed to imply that this good was to be found in pleasure.

However that may be, Aristippus was convinced that such was Socrates' meaning. His early training, moreover, in Protagorean doctrine led him to pivot the moral life upon the individual and to feel that each man was the sole judge of what was pleasantest and therefore best for him. He sought also, in pursuance of this logic, to make the moral life of the individual revolve about the present moment, and to make each separate instant sufficient unto itself. The good, he said, lay in the pleasure of the moment. But as it was manifestly impossible to ignore the possible painful consequences of a pleasure in estimating its worth at the moment, the Cyrenaics were forced to modify their doctrine and admit something besides intrinsic value into the computation of total goodness. Since the most important consequences were due generally to the recoil of society, pleasure was best obtained by adapting oneself to society and the world as one found them. Hence, although

in theory pleasures were equally good irrespective of their sources, and the individual was superior to law and public opinion, even to the extent of being justified in committing a so-called "crime" if it gave him enjoyment and he could escape painful consequences, still, the wise man would make it a rule to conform to the law and usages of his world and avoid punishable or censurable acts.

The Cyrenaics, then, did not demand the abolition of society as it stood or advocate any return to a state of nature. Nor was their behavior, although somewhat lax and quite frank and free from hypocrisy, in any way original and startling. But if they tolerated and even approved the social system into which they were born, it was only because they saw in it a means that each individual might use with profit to the furtherance of his own ends and the securing of his private pleasure. The majority of them, like the Cynics, professed themselves "citizens of the world" above such ties as family affection, patriotism, and friendship, except in so far as these things might prove advantageous. Anniceris, alone, saw that the social, self-sacrificing instincts were as innate and primary as the selfish ones, and thus forestalled such modern forms of Hedonism as the Utilitarian ethics.

The Cyrenaics also made an important contribution to psychology when they did away with the distinction between physical and mental pleasures and pointed out that all enjoyment, whatever its source, was a feeling, and therefore an activity of the body.

In their logic and theory of knowledge both the Cynics and the Cyrenaics drew largely from the Sophists. They were ardent opponents of the Platonic theory that Reality is composed of the abstract Forms and common natures, expressed in class-concepts and common names, in the knowledge of which our search for truth comes to rest. Not only, they declared, had these Forms no standing in metaphysics, but they gave us no knowledge of anything. They were mere empty names, according to the Cynics, based upon chance and surface resemblances, and did not in any way reveal the private and individual nature that makes each particular thing itself and

nothing else. The Cyrenaics went still further. Holding that the objects of knowledge were not outer things, but sensations, and convinced that the individual could know no sensations save his own, they maintained that, since different individuals were not in a position to compare their experiences, it was impossible to know whether or no their streams of sensation were similar. Common names and class-concepts, then, far from indicating the real natures of objects, did not even stand for any resemblance, however superficial, between your sensations and mine that could be verified. They were as baseless and misleading in logic and the theory of knowledge as they were worthless for propping up futile speculation about the nature of the world. This attitude towards class-concepts and common natures, or "universals" as they are also called, made the Cynics and the Cyrenaics the progenitors of the famous "nominalistic" theory. And their disagreement with Plato was the beginning of an endless controversy over the existence and standing of class-concepts and Forms, which raged with special violence in the disputes of the Schoolmen in the Middle Ages, and still agitates philosophy to-day.

But now let us turn to Plato, and to his famous theory of Ideas or Forms, which has been under such bitter attack.



## CHAPTER IV

### PLATO'S LIFE AND TIMES

#### I

THE eighty years of Plato's life span one of the most Heraclidean and unstable epochs of Greek history. Born at Athens in 427 B. C., two years after the death of Pericles, he saw with the eyes of childhood and youth the last phases of the Peloponnesian War and the destruction of the Athenian Empire. He was fourteen at the time of the Sicilian Expedition and the disaster at Syracuse, which spelled the beginning of the end with their immediate consequences of rebellion among the subject-allies of the Delian League, Persian intervention on the side of Sparta, and an anti-democratic revolution and brief régime of oligarchy in the capital itself. And he had but just come of age when the Spartan fleet gave the *coup de grace* at Aegisopotami, and Athens was in the death-struggle of the second overthrow of the democracy and the interregnum of the Thirty Tyrants, which preceded her final surrender to Lacedaemon.

The period of Spartan supremacy that followed lasted a generation, but it brought not peace but a sword. The Ionian cities, which Sparta had allowed Persia to seize in return for help against Athens, took part in the unsuccessful revolt of Cyrus against his brother, the Great King, and recovered for the moment their freedom. After Cyrus' death they were again threatened with subjection, and turned for help to Sparta, their former betrayer. The latter, finding conditions changed and tempted by the possible spoils, came to their aid and threw an army, including the remnant of Xenophon's famous Ten Thousand, into Asia Minor. The Aegean world was ablaze again. For six years, as long as Sparta controlled the sea, the Persians were consistently worsted. But in the meantime they were collecting a fleet, under the command of

the Athenian admiral Conon, and, what is more, were making trouble very successfully for their enemy at home. Sparta was not a popular victor and overlord, and it scarcely needed the bribes and promises of a Persian agent to combine against her Thebes and Athens, seconded by her former allies in the Peloponnesian War who had made heavy sacrifices in her behalf and received nothing in return. The result was that she found not only a Persian, but a new Greek, war on her hands. Events on both sides of the Aegean culminated in 394 B. C. The Persian fleet defeated the Spartans at Cnidus and by its mastery of the sea made their position in Asia so untenable that they were forced to retire altogether. And in Greece, although they were technically the winners of the battle of Coronea, they received so severe a check at the hands of the Thebans that they had to evacuate Boeotia and fall back to the Peloponnesus, where the allied forces managed for a while to hold them prisoners. At this time Plato was thirty-three years old.

Athens made the best of the temporary check to Spartan pretensions. She rebuilt between the city and the Peiraeus the Long Walls, which she had had to raze at the end of the Peloponnesian War. Moreover, she reconstituted her navy, and re-established her supremacy on the shores of the Hellespont and the Propontis. Owing to the pressure, however, of the Great King backed by Sparta, the Greek cities of Ionia and the islands of Clazomenae and Cyprus had to be abandoned once and for all to Persia. Renewed activity on the part of the Spartans and a new invasion of Boeotia, which brought them to Plataea and the very gates of Attica, threw Athens once more into the arms of Thebes, and an unauthorized but unpunished raid by a Spartan commander into Athenian territory precipitated new hostilities. Athens formed a new League, directed this time, not against Persia, but against Sparta, and gradually the Lacedaemonians were driven back by land. On the sea, too, they were signally defeated at the battle of Naxos, and were set back badly in an attack that they made on the island of Corcyra. These checks inclined them to a peace, which Athens, whose enmity towards

Sparta was already more than counterbalanced by her jealousy of the growing power of her ally Thebes, was only too ready to accept. (371 B. C.)

The remaining twenty-five years of Plato's life were passed for the most part under happier auspices so far as his country was concerned. To be sure, war broke out again immediately, provoked by a Spartan invasion of Boeotia in direct contravention of the peace terms. But out of the scraps of the treaty Sparta pieced together, as it were, her own death warrant. The Thebans, under Epaminondas, defeated her at Leuctra, to the surprise of everybody including themselves, and not only drove her back across the Isthmus, but invaded the Peloponnese, where the subject cities of Arcadia had already revolted against her. And a second invasion ended with the total destruction of her power and the break-up of her empire at the battle of Mantinea in 362. Athens had at first remained neutral, but her fear of Theban supremacy had prevailed and she had joined forces with Sparta to redress the balance of power. She had backed the wrong horse, it is true, but things turned out to her advantage in the end. She did not become deeply involved in the war and had an opportunity, while her friends and foes were busy, to extend and consolidate her new empire. And when, after Mantinea the Thebans, who had lost their great general, Epaminondas, failed in the hour of victory to exploit their position politically and pursue a policy of aggression, she found herself, now that Sparta was prostrate, the great power of Greece once more, free to add to her territory the Thracian Chersonese and to recover Euboea, with none to say her nay.

Still, Plato's star was not destined to set in a cloudless sky. It had risen among storm-clouds, and when it sank, they were piling high and ominous again to the north and east. He had seen the fall of the first Athenian Empire, and he was to see the beginning of the dissolution of the second. Before his death the islands of the eastern Aegean, including Rhodes, had been lost to the growing power of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor. In the north a new power, Macedon, was taking under Philip its first steps towards an eventual domination of the world.



The so-called Sacred War between Phocis and Thebes, in the course of which the Phoceans occupied Delphi, seized the temple treasure, and spent part of it bribing the tyrants of Pherae to attack the Thessalian allies of Thebes, had caused the Thes-salians to appeal to Macedon for help. Thus Philip was given a pretext for intervention in Greek affairs, and for bringing a Macedonian army to the pass of Thermopylae. Athens was already being threatened in her Thracian possessions, and her great patriot and orator Demosthenes had sounded the alarm in his first Philippic. In 348 she lost the island of Euboea in a revolt instigated by Macedonian intrigue. The next year, when Plato died, Alexander the Great was already nine years old.

## II

Plato's education may be said to have begun some six hundred years before his birth. He was, to be sure, reported and apparently believed by his nephew Speusippus to have been the son of Apollo—an honor shared, it will be remembered, by Pythagoras. More credible evidence, however, defers his divine origin to the mythical past, and through an earthly father, Ariston, enrolls him in one of the oldest and best born of the Athenian families, which claimed descent from Codrus, the last king of Athens, and sprang originally, so the tradition ran, from the God Poseidon himself. The family of his mother, Perictione, was even more distinguished. It, too, looked to the great Earth Shaker and Lord of the Sea as its first parent and counted among its kin, Solon, the law-giver and author of the first Athenian constitution, who, "in common with Anacreon . . . and many other poets," had commemorated in his verses the fame of his stock "for beauty, virtue, and all other high fortune." More contemporary members were Critias, a moving spirit of the oligarchic revolution and chief among the Thirty Tyrants, a cousin of Perictione; Charmides, her brother, famed for his grace and beauty, and also prominent later in the councils of the oligarchic party; and Pylampes, her uncle and second husband, no less handsome, "who never met his equal in Persia at the court of the Great King or in the whole

continent in all the places to which he went as Ambassador for stature and beauty." Besides Plato, Perictione had by her first husband Adeimantus and Glaucon, who are introduced by their brother as characters in the *Republic* and again in a later dialogue the *Parmenides*.

Of the number and the glory of the generations that had given him birth Plato was proud, and this pride as well as the fact of race helped not a little to color, or perhaps we shall say, to clarify his outlook on life. It was born and bred in him to discriminate between the noble and the vulgar, the beautiful and the ugly, the better and the worse, and to divide his world into two camps between which there could be no compromise. This heritage, allied as it was to a temperament prone to moral enthusiasm and mystical vision, might in other circumstances have produced quite different results. Had the camp to which he belonged been on top, had the world been more to his liking or he more shielded from it, he would perhaps have been spared that cynicism about appearances which is the beginning of philosophic wisdom, and have remained a mere statesman or a mere poet, too much in love with helping manage things as they were to perceive their local and temporary nature, or else too enamored of mooning at will among things as they were not to see that after all they revolved about and gravitated towards an earth. Or at least, since it is hard to imagine Plato without a philosophy, his system in happier and less favorable circumstances might have been, like Hegel's for example, a provincial glorification of the world in general and of his own place in it in particular.

Far, however, from being to his taste and giving free scope for the exercise of either his practical or his artistic capacities, the world into which he was born was one from which he instinctively recoiled, and yet from which he could not retire to dream of a better. His most impressionable years were spent, as we have already remarked, among the last scenes of the Peloponnesian War, so fraught with disaster and humiliation abroad and shame at home. An idealist and a dreamer in love with the beautiful and the good, a patriot and an aristocrat whose fathers had told him of the noble works done by

Pericles in their day and by his own ancestors in the old time before them, he was fated to watch the swift ruin of his relatives, his friends, his class, his country. The Empire was a scattered wreckage of a thousand islands and cities washed up by the sea. A Spartan garrison was on its way to encamp in the Acropolis. Nay more, Athens had lost not only the whole world but, it might seem, her soul as well. Under Pericles she had appeared for a moment as a truly imperial and aristocratic democracy—a whole people, almost, of noblemen, docile to the guidance of its wisest and its best. But it needed a gentleman and a genius like Pericles to sustain her even for a moment at that level. Already during his life the disintegrating forces that we noted in the chapter on the Sophists were at work. And after his death the demoralization was rapid and complete. The democracy that had almost justified itself as a form of government by following his leadership now flung itself with characteristic fickleness into the arms of the leader of the opposition, the practical, but unenlightened and unscrupulous demagogue, Cleon, only to turn from him to the chaster but less virile embrace of the honest but incompetent Nicias, and again to the more vicious seductions of the brilliant, reckless, and wholly untrustworthy Alcibiades. And the same hands as had helped build the Parthenon and had applauded the transfiguration of the blind vengeance of the outworn Furies into the humane justice of the "Eumenides," now nonchalantly committed the atrocity at Melos, or condemned and executed wholesale the generals after Arginusae in the name of piety and patriotism and in defiance of every consideration of law and right, or put Socrates to death because he made a nuisance of himself criticizing and opposing these democratic ways.

It could have given Plato little comfort, however, to turn from the degradation of popular government to the behavior of his own set. The everlasting struggle between the rich and the poor at Athens had been intensified rather than suspended by the war with Sparta. The rich had more than ever to fight for their lives, and in the circumstances no very great nicety of conduct was to be expected. Still, their scutcheon was



blotted with perhaps an unnecessary amount of unscrupulousness and endeavor to make private capital of public interests. Nor were they any cleaner fighters as the upper than as the under dog. The episode of the Four Hundred engineered by Alcibiades, and the reign of terror of the Thirty Tyrants which had cast such dishonor on his uncle Charmides and his cousin Critias, were enough to disillusion Plato on that score.

The perspective, then, in which events must inevitably have been viewed by one born with such an eye and to such times was calculated to keep Plato at a distance from his world. He could not, to be sure, regard things dispassionately, but his passion of revolt bred a detached and critical attitude, which in a smaller mind might have got no further than carping and lamentation, but which in his case stimulated meditation and put him on the road towards philosophy. Furthermore, it was a perspective that justified his native tendency to discriminate between the sheep and the goats in the flock of events and to divide his world into two folds. With him there could be no easy, thoughtless optimism, no facile confusion of the merely practicable and expedient with the ideal, no hocus-pocus of transforming somehow the shortcomings of the universe into the very substance of its perfection. He could not sing "all's right with the world" with the exuberant but injudicious Pippa, or, in despair of bettering things otherwise than by submitting to them, exclaim like the Stoics that all things were according to nature and that whatever was according to nature was good. Instinct and experience had made of him too convinced a dualist for that. Over against the world as he wished it stood the stubborn, brutal fact of things as they were. He began perhaps by contrasting the Athens of his day with the Athens of his father's time, or with the simplicity, discipline, and competence of Spartan life, and then with the vision of the perfect city that was beginning to take shape in his mind. And later, when the scope of his meditation was enlarged to include all time and existence, it was natural for him to cleave the universe in two and oppose to the corruption and inconstancy of the stream of dissolving phenomena an order that was not only better, but also truer and more real, than

the flux. For such a dualism there was, moreover, ample precedent in the philosophies with which he was becoming familiar.

Plato's immediate family escaped by good fortune the financial ruin that the War was bringing upon so many of his set, and notably upon his uncle Charmides, and it was therefore in a position to give him every advantage of education that money could bestow. There were the conventional seven years of nursery life at home, with games and play, and the old nurse who told him tales of the Gods and heroes, and frightened him with stories of hobgoblins that would eat up little boys unless they were good. And then came the tutor to admonish him as to the dress, table manners, and general deportment of a little gentleman, to punish him if need be, and to take him to the best private school in town and fetch him home at night. There he must wrestle awhile with reading and writing and perhaps a little arithmetic, though he had probably learned at home to reckon with his fingers or even with pebbles and a reckoning board. Once he had mastered his letters, there were interminable passages from the Iliad and Odyssey, selections from Hesiod, and suitable precepts from the Gnostic, and songs from the Lyric poets, all to be learned by heart. And there were lessons in singing and accompanying himself upon the lyre, or perhaps, if he had a special aptitude for music, upon the cither. Later, every afternoon saw instruction in wrestling and running and jumping and throwing the quoit and the spear. As the boy grew older and stronger, more and more attention was given to athletics, till, at the age of eighteen, he must have left home and school in common with his comrades for the two years of military and almost exclusively physical training in camp and garrison and field, required by the state of the sons of all Athenian citizens.<sup>1</sup> It is not improbable that he was assigned to the cavalry as his branch<sup>2</sup> and took his place in the splendid troop already im-

<sup>1</sup> The supplementation and eventual replacement of military training by instruction in literature, rhetoric, and philosophy does not seem to have begun before the third century B. C.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, Bk. V, ch. I, 1.

mortalized by Pheidias in the frieze of the Parthenon. And considering that Athens was now making her last desperate stand against Sparta, it is not improbable that Plato saw active service. His brothers, he tells us, distinguished themselves at Megara.<sup>3</sup> Ancient tradition, indeed, drawing, it would seem, largely upon the imagination, credited him with taking part in three campaigns and awarded him the prize for valor at Delium, where his stepfather, Pyrilampes, also fought and was wounded.

His prowess in other lines was celebrated by antiquity in a similarly fulsome and untrustworthy way. We hear of his fame as an athlete, and how he entered the wrestling contests and carried off the victory at the Pythian, Isthmian, and Olympic Games. In fact, the name "Plato" was a nickname meaning broad. Painting, we are told, he studied with the best Athenian artists of his day, and his music master was a pupil of the celebrated musician Damon, the bosom friend of Pericles. How much truth there is in these reports it is impossible to determine, but they bear witness at least to the outstanding and universal quality of Plato's genius, of which there can be no doubt. Nor, on this point have we any reason to challenge the statement of his nephew that he was from the beginning a hard-working and exceptionally brilliant student who showed early all the promise that he later more than fulfilled.

In any case this genius found at hand far more to feed on than was provided by the old-fashioned curriculum. The new education advocated and provided by the Sophists, with their lectures on grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, the physical sciences, and philosophy, was already supplementing and taking the place of the classical system. And Plato could not escape or disdain the new knowledge that they were diffusing. Indeed, his first lessons in philosophy were had, not from Socrates, but from a Heracleitean named Cratylus, who had developed the Protagorean and skeptical possibilities of his master's doctrine to a very high and rather thin pitch. He refused to speak, it is said—words, we may suppose, being

<sup>3</sup> Whether the engagement of 424 B. C. or 409 B. C. is referred to is an open question. Cf. Zeller, *Plato*, p. 6, note 6; Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 207.



too evanescent, subjective, and relative to the speaker to convey knowledge<sup>4</sup>—but would only move his finger; and this apparently merely to intimate that it was not only impossible to step into the same river twice as Heracleitus had declared, but even to do so once, because the man in the water would not be identical with himself on the bank, so swift and intangible was the flux.

This first teaching left a profound, though at the time subconscious, impression on Plato's mind, and later, when he came to work out his own system, he found in the flux the natural undercurrent of the impermanence, the incompleteness, the incurable falling short and slipping back, of the world of particular and concrete things. In the Heracleitean Logos also—in the unchanging law and order of change manifested in even the wildest vagaries of the turbulent stream of existence—he may have got his first hint that beyond the rush and turmoil of the things of sense there might really be the calm, the peace, the handhold on eternity, of which he dreamed.

That odd friend of his uncle Charmides, the eccentric and conspicuous Socrates, must also have been a familiar enough figure of his childhood and youth. We are told, to be sure, that the two did not meet till Plato was twenty, but the credibility of this statement has been challenged.<sup>5</sup> Still, however long-standing his acquaintance with Socrates may have been, and however profound the admiration and warm the friendship into which it ripened, Plato was by no means immediately converted, like Antisthenes and Aristippus, to the profession of philosophy as a life work, and it is an open question whether he was ever a member of the more intimate circle of Socrates' disciples.<sup>6</sup> His interest in the subject to be sure must have been deepening all the while and working beneath the surface. And he was steadily becoming more and more attached to Socrates' person and influenced by his teaching; so much so, indeed, that when his philosophic genius eventually did flower on Socrates' grave, he of all the disciples was the best fitted, not only by his talents but by his sympathy and understanding,

<sup>4</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>6</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

to record and express the greatness and beauty of his master's character and teaching. But for the moment Plato's ambitions lay elsewhere, more drawn to artistic pursuits and by the fascination of public affairs.

As for Socrates, probably he, too, had no inkling of the career that awaited his pupil. In the night before Plato came to him he may perhaps have dreamed, as the ancient tradition had it, that a swan, the bird of Apollo, came flying towards him with sweet song. But apparently he entertained an angel unawares, seeing in Plato, so far as he saw anything, only a young man whose position and capacities entitled him to a brilliant public career if he chose to avail himself of his opportunities. And certainly he never suspected that this broad-browed, well-set-up, rather shy but appreciative youth, the nephew of his friend Charmides, with his great family and his high political connections with both parties, his fine mind and artistic temperament, his keen interest in poetry and music and politics as well as in philosophy, was destined to be one of the greatest philosophers of all time, in whose undying fame he himself was to find the best part of his own immortality.

For, as we have said, Plato was bent at the moment on other things. Like many another young man about town, he was, for example, trying his hand at verses, the writing of which among the Athenians as among the Japanese was a mark and a diversion of the fashionable world. The ancient tradition probably credits him with far more than he ever wrote and with literary aspirations that he cherished only remotely, if at all. In addition to songs and dithyrambs, or lyric outbursts of a type of which Dryden's "Alexander's Feast" is perhaps the best illustration in English, we are told that he not only wrote a dramatic work in the conventional form of three connected tragedies and a burlesque or "satyr-play," but also composed an epic—which he tore up when it was finished because it proved so inferior to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. He intended furthermore, so the story runs, to take part in the official competitions held each year for the best tragedy to be presented at a festival of Dionysus, and his drama had already been passed by the authorities for performance, granted a chorus, and turned

over to the actors for rehearsal, when his interest suddenly veered to philosophy, and he withdrew the drama from the lists and burned it along with the rest of his verse. However that may be, and most of it is doubtful, the Greek Anthology has preserved fragments of love-poems purporting to be his, of which some at least may be genuine. They are not of signal merit, but two epigrams of reputation and beauty may be quoted in passing. To a friend named Aster, or Star, he writes:

“Sweet Child, thou star of love and beauty bright,  
Alone thou lookest on the midnight skies;  
Oh! that my spirit were yon Heaven of light  
To gaze upon thee with a thousand eyes.”

and again on the death of the same friend:

“Thou wert the morning star among the living,  
Ere thy fair light had fled;  
Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving  
New splendour to the dead.”<sup>7</sup>

More than his art, however, the impulse to take up politics as a career and devote himself to the public service was to the fore in Plato's mind. There were the traditions of his family which for twenty generations, in story at least, had labored to make Athens more glorious. There was the example of his stepfather, who had been a supporter and personal friend of Pericles at the moment when democracy seemed about to succeed. On his mother's side he had a “pull” with the oligarchic party through his uncle and cousin. And finally Socrates himself was urging him to take the step.<sup>8</sup> Twice, indeed, the die was nearly cast. After the revolution and the establishment of the Thirty, Charmides and Critias urged him to enter politics and join their ranks. And he might perhaps have done so, had his disgust and indignation not been aroused by an attempt of the new authorities to force Socrates to act as an agent of theirs in the illegal arrest of one Leon of Salamis whom they wished to put to death. Again, after the fall of the oligarchy, the temptation recurred. The restored democracy, led by

<sup>7</sup> Trans. Shelley.

<sup>8</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 210.



Thrasybulus, showed at first considerable common sense and generosity. A general political amnesty was declared, the question of compensation for the property confiscated by the oligarchs was waived or compromised, and the debt incurred by them was assumed by the new government in an honest attempt at a thoroughgoing reconciliation of the hostile factions. Sweeping reforms were also introduced and, what is more, carried out. The statute law was amplified and revised. The list of Athenian subjects was purged of foreigners, and the strict requirements for citizenship originally drawn up by Solon were re-enacted. The old custom was revived of paying citizens for jury duty and attendance at the Assembly and even at the theatre. Incidentally, the Ionic alphabet with its special characters for long vowels and double consonants was officially adopted. And finally the navy was reorganized, and Athenian finances were placed on a sound basis. The democracy was apparently trying to make a fresh and better start, and for the moment Plato seems to have felt that here, at last, was a movement towards good government in which he could take part without sacrifice of principle or loss of self-respect. But his faith and hope were doomed to be short lived, and with them his charity. He had reckoned once more without his host. Though the new régime might agree to let bygones be bygones, its virtues did not include a tolerance of further free speech of an anti-democratic nature, particularly on the part of one exasperating old busybody, the friend of oligarchs, beloved of the shifty Alcibiades and the hated Critias, and still a great fascinator of Athenian youth; a veritable gadfly for persistence and annoyance, to whose buzzing and stinging nothing, it would seem, short of death, could put a stop. Within five years of its return to power the democratic government had managed to find edifying moral and religious reasons why its discomfort should be relieved, and had tried and executed Socrates.

The death of his master turned Plato definitely and irrevocably into a philosopher. He had been active in Socrates' behalf during the trial, and had been confident of an acquittal. He had wished, it is said, to undertake the defense him-

self, and had been among the friends who offered to pay the fine that they had finally prevailed upon the old man to propose as an alternative penalty. It may be, too, that the shock of the conviction helped bring on the illness that prevented his being at hand when the sentence was carried out.<sup>9</sup> In any case it seems to have provoked a moral crisis, not unlike the experience of religious conversion, which fixed once and for all Plato's nature and revealed to him his final mission. The outrage done his sense of right and wrong aroused his conscience and gave seriousness and even severity to his character. The flood of grief and anger by which he was swept drowned everything except the memory and example of Socrates. Poetry and art, if they had not been already largely subordinated to the growth of his other interests, now appeared trivial and unworthy. All hope of a political career was at an end, for it was unthinkable that he should enter public life in the service of a people that had just deliberately committed so wanton and unjustifiable a crime. Moreover, the explosion of anti-aristocratic feeling made Athens too uncomfortable, if not too dangerous, for him to remain there. The old world, which had been little enough to his liking, had come tumbling about his ears, and the ruins were not fit to live in. The only refuge left him, the only place where henceforth he could move freely and without repugnance, was the world of thought, of theory, of vision of the untarnished Forms that dwelt beyond the confusion and imperfection of the brute facts of sense and material accomplishment. And into this world the dead Socrates imperiously beckoned him. His business in life had become clear—to follow in Socrates' footsteps, to vindicate and exalt his memory, to think, to discourse, to teach the truth and seek the good as he had done. To the support of this new ideal which gave concentration and point to his genius Plato's other selves rose transfigured. The would-be statesman, cut off from a hand in public affairs and turned to reflection, meditated an ideal state in which philosophers should be kings, and founded a school of educational and political theory to which princes sent their sons to learn

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Zeller, *Plato*, p. 22.

how to rule. The poet and artist, haunted by a moral influence and vision, devoted all his craftsmanship to portraying in the Dialogues "the wisest and the justest and the best of men," and made himself the playwright of a great philosophic system, modelling it in dramatic form with matchless skill and grace, and dedicating it no less to beauty than to truth.

This is not to say that Plato turned white over night. The foundations of his conversion had long since been laid in years of association with Socrates, and its effects were equally slow working. Some years probably were to pass, and other influences and experiences were to be brought to bear, before the great picture of his master took on shape; and a still longer time, perhaps, before he began to set forth a doctrine of his own. Indeed it is part of the argument that the earlier Platonic dialogues, even including the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, reproduce Socrates' own views, to suppose that Plato began his career as a historian of philosophy and a recorder of other people's opinions rather than as an independent thinker.<sup>10</sup> To this point we shall have occasion to return again.

After the death of Socrates Plato found it advisable to leave town for a while till things should blow over. His first move was short—to Megara only a few miles away. There he visited his fellow-pupil Euclid, who seems to have kept open house for a number of refugees from the Socratic circle and to have been the rallying point of a brilliant and sympathetic gathering. Plato was much impressed with Euclid's view, with which we familiarized ourselves in the last chapter, that the Socratic Good is identical with the Eleatic One and is therefore the only thing that has real being. Its influence was long enduring, and the difficulties that little by little he began to find in it proved important factors in stimulating him to critical and independent thought.<sup>11</sup>

How Plato spent the next ten years is something of a mystery. The length of his stop at Megara is unknown. Ancient tradition fills in the rest of the period with extensive sojournings in Egypt and Cyrene, which, though probably exagger-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-212, § 162.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-231, §§ 176-177.



ated, may have some foundation in fact. He must also have devoted a part of his time to literary work, for to this decade belong apparently the so-called "Socratic" dialogues, the *Apology*, *Euthryphro*, *Crito*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, and *Lysis*, and possibly the *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, and a part of the *Republic*.<sup>12</sup> But whether Plato wrote as he ran, or settled at Athens again towards the end of the epoch, is uncertain.

We do find him, however, pretty definitely on a trip to Italy and Sicily some twelve years after Socrates' death. One of the things that had most affected him during his discipleship was the Orphic-Pythagorean teaching. With the belief in the divine origin and fall of the soul, her weary round of re-incarnation, and her ultimate escape and reunion with the Godhead, he must always have been more or less familiar and impressed in its Orphic guise. But there were also such fascinating doctrines as those of Limit and the Unlimited, of Form and Matter, and of Reality as Number, to arrest his attention, as well as extensive investigations in mathematics—a subject that he, too, was keenly interested in and had studied, if not in Egypt and Cyrene, at any rate with Theodorus of

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 211–212, § 162. The order in which the Platonic Dialogues were written has been greatly disputed and is still an open question. The old view regarded the critical dialogues like the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides* as earlier than the great constructive works like the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*. This view, however, is now largely discredited. The modern theory, originally proposed by Campbell and Lutoslawski, and founded upon a comparison of the style of the other Dialogues with that of the *Laws*, Plato's latest work, places the constructive dialogues before the critical. Lutoslawski for example suggests the following order:—first a "Socratic" group mentioned above; then a first Platonic group composed of the *Cratylus*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and the first book of the *Republic*; then a middle Platonic group comprising the rest of the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides*; and finally a later group—the *Sophist*, *Politicus*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Laws*. This general order is in the main accepted, though the exact sequence is still a subject of considerable dispute. The problems of how much in the Dialogues is "Socratic" and how much Plato's own doctrine, and of whether and to what extent Plato changed his views as time went on, are of course intimately connected with the question of sequence. We may note that critics like Burnet would consider that everything through the *Phaedrus* is mainly "Socratic" rather than "Platonic" and that only the critical dialogues give us pure Plato.

Cyrene at Athens. A great part of this Pythagorean doctrine he may have had from Socrates' own lips, as we have seen;<sup>13</sup> but, if not, there had been fellow-disciples to share and discuss it with him, like Cebes and Simmias and Phaidondas from Thebes. Before joining Socrates they had been pupils of Philolaus, the most prominent Pythagorean of his day, who had fled from Italy to Greece at the time of the great uprising against the Brotherhood. From him they had learned that the earth was not stationary and the centre of the universe, but revolved about a central fire; that the differences between even the four elements were purely matters of geometrical form; and that the soul was a harmony of the bodily parts, although it had a double, or was somehow perhaps itself, only imprisoned temporarily in the body for its sins in a former existence. Philolaus had written a book, too, in which these views were set forth, and Plato, so a rather untrustworthy tradition states, had bought it at a high price and read and profited by it. In any case what his friends had told him was indelibly impressed upon his memory and haunted him with its charm. But there were few Pythagoreans left in Greece to talk to, now. The proscription in Italy was over long ago, and even before the death of Socrates Philolaus had gone back to die at Tarentum, his native town;<sup>14</sup> where, at the date of which we are speaking, the Order was once more firmly established and many of its prominent members were living. What, then, was more natural than that Plato, captivated by their mathematics and philosophy and eager to hear more at first hand, should decide to visit Italy? This at any rate is the motive that has been suggested for his first Italian journey.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the reasons for the trip may have been, it is certain that he spent a large part of it in Pythagorean company. He became especially intimate with Archytas, who had been a pupil of Philolaus and was now not only the most celebrated representative of the Order but one of the most universal geniuses of his time. His merits as a philosopher were such

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *supra*, pp. 58, 74.

<sup>14</sup> The birthplace of Philolaus is also given as Crotona.

<sup>15</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 211, § 161.

that Aristotle devoted a special treatise—unfortunately lost—to his system, and his contributions to arithmetic, geometry, mechanics, acoustics, and the theory of music were ranked very high. Also, if the story be true of his having devised a small flying-machine in the shape of a wooden pigeon balanced by an arrangement of weights and pulleys and launched by the escape of compressed air, he must be regarded as one of the fathers of aeronautics. Incidentally, he is said to have invented the rattle to amuse the children of his slaves. And he was an accomplished performer upon the flute. On the practical side, moreover, he showed not only ingenuity but great wisdom and force of character. He was the leading statesman of his city and a beloved and respected governor, and to his generalship as commander-in-chief of the army Tarentum owed her successful campaigns against even such powerful neighbors as Syracuse. Finally, all these qualities and talents were rooted in a fine and lovable nature full of charity and kindness. Plato and he quickly became fast friends. They talked mathematics and philosophy together, and Plato may perhaps have felt that at last he had met a man who lived up to his ideal of the perfect ruler in whom the king was a philosopher and the philosopher a king.

At this time, also, he made another friend who was destined to play an important part in his life. He was curious, it seems, to see the volcano Etna—or, as some say, probably maliciously, to try the Sicilian cooking, which was quite the French *cuisine* of the day—and the Pythagoreans, hospitably eager to make everything pleasant for their guest, either recommended or introduced him personally to a young man named Dion, a brother-in-law of the reigning tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysius I. Dion, out of kindness and curiosity, or, it may be, if he actually met Plato at Tarentum, out of friendship, asked his brother-in-law to invite the distinguished Athenian to come over from Tarentum for a visit. Dionysius may have been all the more willing to do so as he was developing an ambition to do the proper tyrannical thing and adorn his court with a literary and scientific circle. Indeed, he took to writing poetry himself in his old age, so bad, it is said, that it was hissed when it was read



at the Olympic Games. And, so goes the gossip, he even died a poetic death induced by too great indulgence of his joy, when finally the Athenians, moved, we may suspect, more by his political importance than his merits as a dramatist, awarded the prize at one of their official competitions to a tragedy of his entitled *The Ransom of Hector*.

However all this may be, Plato came to Syracuse as Dionysius' guest. But he found the court not at all to his liking. The affection of the youthful Dion, then about twenty years old, he fully returned; but his host he could not stomach. The tyrant was in almost all respects the opposite of the charming and learned Archytas, and for that matter exemplified everything that, in Plato's opinion, a ruler should not be. He was a self-made man whose real qualities could not conceal or offset the fact that he was a parvenu. He had started life in the humble and even despised capacity of a clerk in a magistrate's office, but his bravery as a soldier and his persuasive tongue brought him into public notice, and by a combination of luck, demagoguery, unscrupulous cunning, and real ability he had curried favor with the masses and worked to the fore. He had attacked and ousted the existing military authorities for misconduct of the war against Carthage, and had had himself elected, along with others, a general. Then, having disposed of his fellow commanders, he had manoeuvred himself into the position of generalissimo with full powers, and it needed only the acquisition of a personal bodyguard, which he got by trickery, to make him a full-fledged tyrant. In fact, his rise must have seemed to Plato a perfect illustration of the final catastrophe in the decline of the State, about to be so tellingly described in the last books of the *Republic*—the transition from that next to the worst of all forms of government, democracy without aristocratic guidance, to the final degradation of tyranny. However, he was an able and clever, if unscrupulous and selfish, ruler, and under his sway Syracuse became easily not only the biggest and most important city in the Greek world, but the capital of an empire that comprised two-thirds or more of Sicily and all the toe of Italy, with dependencies along the shore of the instep, the heel, and the Adriatic

side of the ankle, and on the opposite Molossian shore; not to speak of allies in Calabria and Umbria, and at Ancona and the mouths of the Po.<sup>16</sup> But his ambition to drive the Carthaginians entirely out of Sicily and make himself master of the entire island was never fulfilled.

Dionysius' personality, as we have hinted, was not amiable. He was cruel, brutal, and suspicious, and he had never acquired even that superficial graciousness with which monarchs must cloak their boredom and even their displeasure. In the presence of the literary lights of his salon and among his distinguished guests he was naked and unashamed in his rudeness. On one occasion he spat in the face of the philosopher Aristippus, who put up with the insult because, as he explained, one had to get splashed sometimes in landing a big fish. And his domestic poet, Philoxenus, who told him the truth about his verses, was promptly packed off to the stone-quarries. Plato, too, one sometimes fancies, was not a particularly amiable character. In any case he was not a man to stand discourtesy even from a king. The stories that he raked Dionysius over the coals for his faults and spoke his mind on tyranny in general are probably not true. It is more likely that he postponed the expression of his feelings to the eighth and ninth books of the *Republic*, where the perfect tyrant is described at some length. But the two men undoubtedly got much on each other's nerves, and eventually had words. Dion's friendship was of no avail. Dionysius handed Plato over to the Spartan Ambassador—Sparta then being once more at war with Athens—with the request that the philosopher might be so disposed of as never again to worry the royal presence. The Ambassador, doubtless eager to please the court to which he was accredited, and none too sorry to have a chance of baiting the prominent alien enemy delivered into his hands, sent his charge off to Aegina, where it was death for an Athenian to set foot, and put him up for sale in the slave market. But he was recognized by a friend from Cyrene, bought by him, set free, and sent over to Athens,

<sup>16</sup> At least such was the extent of the Syracusan Empire in 379 B. C. a few years after Plato's first visit. Cf. Freeman, *History of Sicily* (ed. 1894), Vol. IV, pp. 211 ff. and map.

glad enough doubtless to reach home alive and quite sure that if there were one thing he would never do, it was to set foot in Syracuse again. The Gods, as we shall presently see, had other ideas.

Plato was now about forty. He was comfortably off and independent. At home things were going well enough. The Socrates affair was forgotten, or, if it was recalled, was remembered with a shame muted by time—like the Dreyfus affair in France to-day. The new war with Sparta had ended, to be sure, in an alliance between Lacedaemon and Persia, which was too strong to be resisted. But in the consequent “King’s” Peace of Antalcidas, under whose terms all the Greek cities of Asia Minor and Cyprus were abandoned to Persian rule, Athens had not been treated as a vanquished power, but had been confirmed in her possession of the islands of Scyros, Lemnos, and Imbros, and left free to conclude such alliances as did not trespass upon the Great King’s preserves. The foundation of her second empire was already laid, and in spite of the temporary check to her recuperation she was, after Sparta, the largest and most powerful state in Greece. It was, then, under favorable auspices that Plato did the conventional philosophic thing and settled down to teach.

He had, however, his own ideas not only as to his curriculum but with regard to the conditions under which teaching should be carried on. Antisthenes was already holding forth in the rooms of the school for bastards, but he ran only a day-school, and his pupils lived anywhere and anyhow with true Cynic independence and indifference. But Plato may have remembered Euclid’s pleasant home in Megara, where the little band of refugees had foregathered, or the charm and intimacy of those bygone days when Socrates with his following used to drop in at the houses of his friends to talk and chaff. And in Italy, doubtless, he had been struck with the life and discipline of the Pythagorean monasteries.<sup>17</sup> So it was, perhaps, that he conceived the idea of something not unlike an English college, where his pupils should come not merely for instruction but to live together under a common rule. Some twenty minutes walk

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 213, § 163.



outside the walls on the road to Eleusis, in the retirement of the suburbs, he had a house and garden. The property was a pleasant one, giving, as it did, on the whispering elms and plane trees and the olive groves of "Academe," a large park and playground laid out and bequeathed to the city by the statesman Cimon, but called after a local hero, or possibly an original owner of the land, named Hecademus. The running waters of the Cephissus babbled near by, and of a still evening "the feathered choir of nightingales" could be heard making their music in the laurel thickets of Colonus. Here, where he had not only his own garden but the shady and quiet walks of the park conveniently at hand for strolling and discoursing, he established himself and set about gathering in his scholars.

The school, known from its location as the "Academy," was at once successful and Plato proceeded to incorporate it—after the fashion of incorporation of the day—as a religious association dedicated to the Muses, the patronesses of philosophy. A college chapel was built and daily services were held in their honor, with solemn commemorative feasts once a month. There seems also to have been a "commons" where the students and sometimes the masters took their meals together. As the college grew, Plato engaged as assistants his nephew Speusippus and one Menedemus of Pyrrha, both without doubt "old boys." So large an establishment must have been something of a drain on Plato's means, and it is possible that as time went on his friends and pupils helped him maintain it. But apparently any one who so desired was always free to drop in and listen.<sup>18</sup>

The method of instruction naturally enough followed the Socratic convention, and was based on friendly association and informal talk punctuated with question and answer. This was supplemented by prepared but probably unwritten lectures, and by the setting of problems in subjects like mathematics, astronomy, and logic to be solved by the students. One of the lectures, on the Good, composed in Plato's old age, was particularly famous and much misunderstood, and was taken down and published by Aristotle and other pupils.<sup>19</sup> The series of Dia-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, Bk. V, ch. 1, § 6. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 26; Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 221 ff., §§ 171-172.

logues, to which he was still adding, was perhaps a thing apart, written, now that he had become a professor, in moments of leisure from his teaching, and intended not so much for his students as for the public.<sup>20</sup>

The course of studies and the object at which it was directed were more novel. Like his master and his fellow disciples, Antisthenes and Aristippus, he had a theory of conduct and a way of conduct to preach, and centred his philosophy about the knowledge and practice of the good. But ethics did not absorb his attention, as it did theirs, to the exclusion, at any rate in the case of the Cynics and Cyrenaics, of all else. The lively curiosity about the nature of Reality, which perhaps even Socrates lacked and scorned, Plato shared to the full with the older thinkers. Nor was it dampened by any Sophistic skepticism regarding the right of the mind to assume that an objective world existed and the power of reason to discover how it was constructed. He had a theory of the character of true Being as positive, comprehensive, and all explaining as the theory, for example, of Democritus or Anaxagoras. It was, then, with an ethics founded upon a survey of the entire universe and braced by definite convictions as to the real nature of things, that he came prepared to tell men what the good was and how they should attain it. And conversely, ethics was so woven into the whole texture of his metaphysics that it glossed Reality with the sheen of moral perfection. There was no disengaging the one from the other and considering them separately.

But if the metaphysician in Plato gave a universal and cosmic background to the problem of conduct, the statesman and man of affairs in him proposed a highly concrete and localized solution. He felt that man was, to use the later phrase of Aristotle, a political animal, and that his moral energies could find their best if not their only expression, so far at least as the affairs of this world were concerned, in civic organization—or rather in civic organizations of the traditional, compact, manageable type of the Greek city-state. He had none of the anti-nationalism and cosmopolitanism, none of the superiority to political institutions, frontiers, ties,

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 214, § 163.

and sentiments, that the Cynics and Cyrenaics thought should characterize the truly good and enlightened man. Aristippus' polite tolerance of government was far enough from his thought; the anarchy preached by Antisthenes was wholly opposed to it. Government was rather the very breath of moral life. Politics was ethics in action. And, though the moral principles applied in government were let down from heaven itself, their proper theatre was not the whole earth bared of all local divisions, barriers, and sentiments, but Athens or Sparta, or Syracuse, or some other particular state. The good man, the philosopher, was necessarily a patriotic man, attached to his city, absorbed in its activities, and fit to govern or be governed by it for the best.<sup>21</sup>

Metaphysics, then, dialectic, philosophy in the largest and most abstract sense of the word, had for Plato a very practical side and function. There could only be law and order and good behavior and happiness in a state if its rulers had a sound philosophy of life. And a sound philosophy of life could come only from a clear and just vision of the truth about all things. To raise his pupils, so far as they were capable of it, to this vision and to make them philosophers in order that they might, so to speak, be kings, was the aim of Plato's scheme. The need of such an education was patent enough to his eye. An intimate and bitter experience had given him his fill of the kind of person by which states ordinarily permitted themselves to be governed. His own Athens had provided samples in abundance of the unenlightened oligarch and democratic leader, and his visit to Syracuse had shown him what might be expected of a king who was not also a philosopher.

To attain, however, to the vision of the true nature of the universe did more than fit a man to play his part wisely and well in this world. Plato's innate mysticism and his immersion in Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine made him feel that philosophy was at the same time a holy thing and an instrument of spiritual redemption. Absorption in the spectacle that it unfolded, by detaching the soul from the body and fortifying her against the seduction of sense, actually helped unbind her

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, pp. 255-236.



from the wheel of birth and rebirth and sped her on the way towards the divine. For, if the mind wiped from its surface the passing show of the sensible world, and, turning to the pure and eternal Forms, made itself a mirror of true Being, it put off the substance along with the shadow of corruption and mortality, and partook once more of the eternity and perfection of the Reality which it reflected. "Happy and Blessed One thou shalt be God instead of mortal."<sup>22</sup> The philosopher, then, was vouchsafed more than practical wisdom and more than insight into the true nature of the universe. He was also a religious initiate who had received a kind of grace. In the world but not of it, he was following the path of a mystical conversion and salvation, at the same time that he trod surely and firmly the ways of earth.<sup>23</sup>

Plainly enough, a study of such concern to both the material welfare of the state and the spiritual redemption of the individual must require a long and arduous course of preparation. And as plainly, no sufficient preparation could be found in Athenian education as it stood. The Sophists, to be sure, had a larger mental horizon and helped draw attention to new studies, some of which, like mathematics, Plato considered of great value. But they dished out both the old and the new knowledge in the form of practical, business courses in rhetoric, aimed no higher than vocational training and professional success, which limited the vision, debased the ideals, and coarsened and enfeebled the mental fibre of their clientele. It was useless to look in that direction for any sound preparatory system.

Again, the old curriculum of the "humanities," literature and music, might put the mind in touch with nobler things and offer it a fairer field more worthy of its efforts. But it was not in itself sufficient to expand and train fine the intellect, which without further exercise might run to superficial and dilettante fat and flabbiness, instead of putting on sound muscle. For, we must remember, the Greek had no "classics"

<sup>22</sup> Orphic Tablet (trans. Harrison), *Prologomena*, p. 669.

<sup>23</sup> For Plato's philosophy as a "conversion of the soul" and a "service of mankind" cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 218, § 168, Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

to give thew and sinew to a purely literary and humane culture. The study of his art and history and literature could not discipline and ennoble his point of view as it disciplines and ennobles ours. However keenly he may have felt the greatness of his civilization, he was too close to it to see it in proportion and perspective and win from it a vision of what is truly great, universal, and enduring in human life. To have reached that vision, he must have stood off from his own day and beheld it mirrored in some revelation of the human spirit in the past, so remote and so detached, so complete and so splendid, as to catch and focus the otherwise scattered and uncertain meanings of the present, and to reflect from them, in a clear and steady light, only what in them belonged to eternity. But the Greek, unlike ourselves, had no such mirror of ancient experience and achievement in which to study and understand himself and his times, and to see his own image transfigured by the spectacle of all time and existence. Nor had he, as we have, at the root of his tongue great "dead" or, in other words, perfectly formed and finished, languages to stiffen by the iron regimen of grammar and translation a "cultural" training, and to give to it a disciplinary value comparable to that of the higher mathematics and the exact sciences. In a word, his own literature and speech were for the Greek almost as slight an incentive to a just and comprehensive view of life, and as inadequate a basis of education, as the study of English and of our own times without a drilling in Greek and Latin and a knowledge of classical culture would be for us. He was forging an unsurpassed instrument for the schooling and the salvation of future generations, but, though he might save others with it, himself he could not save.<sup>24</sup>

Plato seems to have felt this difficulty, though naturally he could not guess its cause. At any rate, though he sympathized with the purpose and respected the honesty that inspired attempts like those of his fellow and rival professor Isocrates to

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 217, § 166, on the deepening of "humanism" first in Roman and then in Renaissance culture owing to the progressive acquisition of more and more "classical" background. Cf. also the *Essays on Greek Literature* by Livingstone and *Greek History* by Toynbee in *The Legacy of Greece* (Oxford).

use the "humanities" as a vehicle for a really sound and liberal education, the attempts themselves he viewed with distrust.<sup>25</sup> This sense of the general inadequacy of such studies as literature, grammar, and rhetoric was doubtless reinforced by his own particular quarrel with the arts. To that quarrel we shall come presently. But for the moment suffice it to say that the same influences as led Plato to burn his own poetry, and, metaphorically speaking, at least, to throw aside his brush and break his lyre, brought him finally to the opinion that the function of all art should be moral edification, and that hence nothing should be read or heard that did not chasten and steel the soul and render her more austere and more detached. Only, then, a highly censored and expurgated literature and music, at the best, could have found any place in his scheme.

Plato had, then, to look elsewhere than to the existing systems of education for the preparatory studies that he desired. He found what he wanted in mathematics. He was keenly interested in them himself, and they already took a prominent place in the Pythagorean discipline which he so much admired. Moreover, here was a study admirably suited, it might seem, to freeing the mind gradually and gently from petty and personal affairs and interests, and to accustoming it little by little to think serenely in impersonal, abstract, and universal terms. No more suitable preliminary training could be conceived for the final, difficult effort of dispensing with every aid of sense and imagination and grasping the Forms of temperance, and justice, and beauty, and goodness, and all the rest, denuded of all illustration and example, simply in themselves.

In the *Republic* Plato constructs in detail the mathematical mill through which, in his opinion, a man must pass, if he is to acquire the elevation, breadth, and justness of vision indispensable to the art of government. And it seems probable that he introduced, so far as he could, much the same curriculum into his own school.<sup>26</sup> If this be the case, after being

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 223, § 173.



perfected in the more abstract bearings of arithmetic, his pupils took up the study of plane, and then of the still undeveloped solid, geometry of the day. After that came astronomy, or the knowledge of the true as opposed to the apparent motion of the heavenly bodies, and harmonics, or the science of the laws underlying sounds and particularly their musical relations. Other sources indicate that considerable attention was also paid to problems of biology and botany and geology, and that the Academy had scientific apparatus, such as maps and astronomical models, and also museum collections.<sup>27</sup> And finally, of course, after the mind had been sufficiently exercised in precise and abstract thinking, came the crowning philosophy or *dialectic*—the understanding and application, without recourse to material aids like apparatus or diagram, of the universal Forms and principles which, in Plato's opinion, constituted true Being.

The next twenty years of Plato's life were devoted to the development of the Academy. He was building better than he knew, for he was really founding the first university in Europe. Thanks to him the Periclean dream of Athens as the "School of Hellas" came in a sense true, and even during his life the city gained the intellectual and educational pre-eminence that she was to keep, in reputation at least, for some eight hundred years. The old days when science and philosophy had to be imported from abroad were over. Foreigners now came to her, not to give but to receive instruction and inspiration. She did not, to be sure, succeed in capturing immediately the Ionian market for the export of her intellectual wares, or the Magna Grecian except for the brief philosophic raid on Syracuse. Pythagoreanism and the brilliant Ionian tradition were both too strongly entrenched on their native shores to invite competition, and the earlier rolls of the Academy contain comparatively few names from Italy and Asia Minor. But pupils came in abundance from northern Greece, Macedon, Thrace, and Greek towns on the shores of the Propontis and the Black Sea, and Plato soon found himself the centre of an enthusiastic

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 223, § 172. Cf., however, also Gomperz, *op. cit.*, Bk. V, ch. 21, § 2.

group of students of mathematics, science, and philosophy, which continually grew in number and prestige as time went on. To mention a few picked at random from the forty years that Plato taught, there were his nephew Speusippus and Xenocrates, both destined later to head the Academy, Eudoxus, the most famous astronomer of the day, who came first in the early days of the school as a youth of twenty-three, and some two decades later returned with a band of pupils of his own which he had gathered about himself at Cyzicus on the sea of Marmora. Nor should we forget Aristotle, son of the Court physician to Amyntas II of Macedon, who turned up at the age of eighteen, when the Academy had been going for some twenty years and was at the height of its fame.

For the most part, too, the young Academicians belonged to rich and powerful families and even to ruling houses. Among them, for example, were the prince Dion, who had followed his beloved Plato from Syracuse, and three young men who were eventually to control the destinies of Arcadia, Elis, and Byzantium—not to speak of the Prince of Atarneus, the friend and uncle or brother-in-law to be of Aristotle. It might almost seem to Plato that he was actually realizing a part, at least, of his hope and turning kings, or at any rate those in high position of authority, into philosophers. Nor was the reverse process of turning philosophers back into kings any less successful. Though a number of his pupils took to an academic career, so many descended again to the lists of practical life and became law-givers, governors, military leaders, and even would-be despots, that later detractors accused him of having founded a school for making tyrants.<sup>28</sup>

The charge was perhaps not without its grain of truth. Plato's interest in politics tended to wax rather than to wane with the passing years, and the practical problem of establishing good government here and now had become, if anything, more absorbing than the vision of the abstract good or of the ideal state. This interest, to be sure, was suffused in his mind

<sup>28</sup> Athenaeus, XI, 508 D ff. Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 30, note 64. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 219, § 168. For a list of Plato's pupils cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 553, note 1.

with a growing austerity in morals and by projects of religious reform that verged on theocracy. And these, in their turn, seem to have sprung from an ever intenser conviction that the world could be saved only through conversion to a rigidly ascetic discipline of life. Still, what drew and held a large proportion of his pupils was not so much his fame as a philosopher, or his programme of moral reform, as the instruction he gave in constitutional law and the art of statesmanship, and the Academy was winning its reputation in Greece as a school no less of the political sciences than of philosophy. Moreover, as Plato came to closer grips with the conditions of his day, he saw more and more clearly the impossibility of putting into effect the scheme set forth in the *Republic*, and his political theory became increasingly realistic. He looked now for his inspiration to systems that had already been tried out, and was inclined to favor a combination of the advantages of tyranny, which was on the rise again, with the best points in democracy. Sparta, with its moderate socialism, its two kings subject to the control of ephors or warders, and its general system of checks and balances, he perhaps regarded as the best government in existence, and the most practicable model for other states. However that may be, we find in the later dialogues a growing inclination to advocate as the best form of practicable government the rule of a single monarch constitutionally limited by law and by the consent of the state as a whole. And it was with this doctrine that Plato inculcated his pupils, and this monarchical ideal that he urged them to realize.

Almost immediately, too, the Academicians seemed to have aroused a certain resentment in some quarters. Their aristocratic tone, their good form and breeding, and the correct way in which they turned themselves out and carried themselves, were all the more marked by contrast with the studied hearty naturalness, untrammelled by any consideration of conventionality, manners, or even propriety, that marked the behavior of the pupils of Antisthenes' rival institution. Thus they quickly got the reputation of a "manner," which, like the traditional Oxford or Harvard manner of to-day, irritated



and excited the ridicule of those who did not possess it. The comic poets were quick to scent a new prey, and the "Academy" hair-cut, and the "Academy" walking sticks, became a target for their jokes.<sup>29</sup> In some cases, moreover, this ridicule seems to have been really deserved. The Academic authorities themselves were apparently somewhat exercised over the lack of philosophic simplicity in dress and deportment that marked their students. The young Aristotle, if ancient report is to be trusted, was an object of special concern. He was a good deal of a snob and poseur, who talked with an affected lisp, and a great deal at that, and figured prominently in the ultra-stylish undergraduate set. He was inordinately preoccupied with the adornment of his person, and the exaggerated cut of his clothes, his too carefully barbered locks, his habit of going daintily shod, and his passion for rings, are said to have greatly annoyed Plato.<sup>30</sup>

The demands made upon Plato by teaching and administrative duties can have left him little time for writing. He had finished the *Republic* and perhaps written the *Phaedrus* in the first years of the school.<sup>31</sup> And now there occurs an interval of literary silence. But the temporary cessation of the Dialogues does not indicate any halt in his philosophic activities. He was turning things over in his mind under the stimulus of his lectures and conversations with his pupils and of the attacks of his opponents, and new and important developments were brewing. If we are to regard all the previous dialogues as essentially a presentation of other people's doctrines, we must think of Plato as now becoming critical of his masters and as striking out for himself and meditating a system of his own. If, on the other hand, we believe that from the beginning Plato put his own opinions into the mouth of Socrates, we shall perhaps imagine him as seeing his ideas in new lights and from new angles, and discovering in them fresh difficulties and problems, suggested perhaps by hostile criticism, which re-

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, Bk. V, ch. 1, § 6.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Aelian, *Varia Historia*, III, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 212, § 162. Raeder, however (*Platons Philosophische Entwicklung*, pp. 278-279), places the date of the *Phaedrus* after 380 B. C.

quired a further statement, and even a revision to some extent, of earlier views. The first fruits of this period of seeming quiescence but of inward ferment were the *Theaetetus* published, at a guess, not many years before 368 B. C. And the *Theaetetus* was followed, at just what intervals and in just what order it is impossible exactly to determine, by the other so-called "critical" dialogues: the *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Politicus* (*Statesman*), and *Philebus*.

This new flow was, however, interrupted by disturbing and important incidents. In the year 367 B. C., Plato's old acquaintance, Dionysius of Syracuse, died. He was sixty-three and had reigned for thirty-eight years—which was something of a record for a tyrant. What is more, he was able to hand on his throne and a great empire to his son. But the younger Dionysius, at the time of his accession a man about thirty, was quite unfitted for the task that devolved upon him. By nature he seems to have been intelligent and not without promise. His father, however, whose reign would not in other respects recall the Victorian Age, anticipated to the full the late Queen's jealousy of the royal prerogative and exclusion of the heir apparent from all participation in affairs of state. And in Dionysius' case the distrust and suspicion were carried to such a point that the prince was left almost without training or preparation of any sort. Consequently, when he finally did come to the throne, he was quite at sea and turned for support and counsel to his uncle Dion, Plato's bosom friend and erstwhile pupil at the Academy, who thus virtually became regent.

The new reign, under Dion's guidance, opened well. The legacy of the Carthaginian war, left by Dionysius I, was converted into an advantageous peace which left the Empire unimpaired. And generally, the young tyrant, conscious of his inexperience, proved amenable to good advice. He was, moreover, not only aware of his shortcomings and of his need of education, but he was also eager to make good his defects and fit himself to rule. Dion, who was without personal ambition or desire to usurp the royal power, sympathized with these aspirations and was quick to suggest a means of satisfying

them. Obviously the man to take his nephew in hand was his admired Plato, whose school was fast getting the name of a veritable training field for princes. It was, however, manifestly impossible to send the reigning monarch of an empire like the Syracusan to Athens to study at the Academy. Perhaps, however, in view of the exceptional circumstances Plato could be persuaded to take leave of absence, come to Syracuse, and undertake the job on the spot. Dionysius himself greeted the idea with enthusiasm. In any case it could do no harm to write and see. The young tyrant sat down and composed a formal but cordial and pressing invitation, and Dion accompanied it with letters explaining the situation and urging Plato to accept.

Plato must have received these communications with mingled feelings. He was sixty, and for the last twenty years he had not stirred from Athens. He was the head of a rapidly growing college, famous throughout the Greek world, which it was hard to trust to other hands, even temporarily. His memories of Syracuse were not alluring. Of the young man himself he knew nothing at first hand—he vaguely remembered, perhaps, a badly brought up little boy some seven or eight years old, but that was all. The father, however, he recollected only too well, and he had only to turn back to certain passages in the *Republic* to refresh any impression that might be in danger of fading. Age, habit, the pressure of business, memories—all inclined him to refuse.

On the other hand times had changed. His “old boy” and devoted admirer, Dion, was now in the saddle. Accounts of the younger Dionysius were not unfavorable, and Dion wrote that his nephew had possibilities, was eager to learn, and was really keen on Plato’s coming. Here was a chance to try the great experiment on a large scale and train a philosopher king of the first magnitude. A further incentive was perhaps furnished by the success of the Pythagorean philosopher, Lysis, in moulding the Theban statesman and general, Epaminondas, a man of the highest ability and noblest character, whose personality at the moment was overshadowing all Hellas. Dion was importunate. The Pythagoreans in Italy, it seems, added



their prayers. The force of circumstances was too overwhelming, the temptation too strong, to be resisted. Plato delegated the management of the Academy, and left for Sicily with a part of his school trailing after him.

Dion had not exaggerated his nephew's sentiments. Plato was met at the dock by the royal carriage and driven in state to the palace, where he was received by the tyrant with open arms. It must have been annoying, to be sure, to find waiting to greet him two old fellow disciples and philosophers for whom he had scant love, Aristippus of Cyrene, and one Aeschines, son of an Athenian sausage maker, and whilom favorite pupil of Socrates, who had gone bankrupt in the perfume business and run away from Athens to dodge his creditors. Still, these after all were only small flies in the ointment of success. At first all went swimmingly. The education of the royal pupil began at once, and a stiff course in mathematics was naturally prescribed. Dionysius took the first doses at least, standing and smiling, and persevered for a time in the treatment. The Court exhibited a like zeal and grit, and for some weeks the sand in the courtyard and garden paths of the palace was wrinkled with geometrical figures and demonstrations painstakingly traced by the tips of the most fashionable walking sticks in Syracuse. The philosopher-king and the perfect state, it might seem, were not merely patterns laid up in heaven, after all.

But all this was too good to last. Dion, like any man, however upright, in the same position, had enemies jealous of his power and eager to undermine his prestige. The conservative die-hards and old-timers left over from the former régime had little use for philosophers and none at all for philosopher-kings, and viewed Plato's radical experiments upon their sovereign with anything but satisfaction. The disaffection came to a head in a cabal led by Philistus, one of the literary lights of the old Dionysius and also one of his ablest ministers, who repaid in this way recall from the exile to which the suspiciousness of his late master had eventually condemned him. The young tyrant's ear was gained. Perhaps mathematics was beginning to pall, and he was tiring a little of being put through

his paces, and was beginning to be restive and impatient of restraint. Whatever latent jealousy he may have had of Dion's assumption of authority was carefully fanned. Letters written by his uncle to the Carthaginians in connection with the peace negotiations were shown him and given a treasonable twist. These machinations succeeded only too well. Within four months of Plato's arrival at Syracuse Dion had been exiled from Sicily. His enemies were delighted, but he had many friends, and his going excited deep resentment, especially among the liberals, who had looked to him for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.

The old guard must surely have thought that the objectionable Plato would depart with him. And Plato himself was only too eager to go, for he was disgusted and disillusioned by the turn events had taken, and was probably willing to yield the palm, so far as the conditioning of philosopher-kings was concerned, to the trainer of Epaminondas. But Dionysius, though his enthusiasm for instruction might have flagged, had taken a real and ineradicable liking for his teacher. With Dion about, three had been a crowd, but now that he was gone the tyrant hoped to have his dear philosopher to himself and to monopolize his attention and perhaps his affection. Plato, for all his protests, might have been indefinitely detained by this embarrassing devotion, had not an outbreak of war come to his rescue. The course of studies had perforce to be broken off, and Dionysius reluctantly let him go. But he exacted a promise of return after the war, which Plato gave on condition that Dion also should be allowed to come back. Plato crossed to Italy, stopped awhile with his old friend Archytas at Tarentum, and then went home.

The next five years he passed quietly and agreeably enough. He took up his teaching and the management of the Academy again and went on with the composition of the "critical" dialogues. He may even have made a beginning, in his mind at least, with the *Laws*, his last work and a product of his old age.<sup>32</sup> To add to his pleasure, Dion, who had been making an almost royal progress through Greece, crowned at Lacedae-

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 301, § 224.

mon by the signal honor, rarely accorded to a foreigner, of full Spartan citizenship, now came to Athens and settled there. The exile, as we may imagine, was received with the utmost cordiality by the Academy. His personality won him many friends and sympathizers, and he became especially intimate with Speusippus.

At Syracuse, meantime, the war had come to an end and Dionysius was beginning to mope for his old teacher. He wrote reminding Plato of his promise and begging him to come back. At the idea, however, of recalling Dion he balked. The breach between the two had, if anything, widened during the exile. The honors with which his uncle had been showered no doubt seemed like so many personal rebukes, if not insults, to himself; and moreover, Dion was the natural rallying point for all the disaffected elements in Syracuse. Plato, however, stood firm and refused to budge without his friend. Then, too, he was getting old, he dreaded the voyage, and he had no desire to tempt Providence again. But Dionysius nagged, and Dion himself, who had never ceased to hope for a reconciliation with his nephew, urged Plato to go and see on the spot what could be done. Archytas added his entreaties, pointing out that Dionysius was a changed man, and that he was really interested in philosophy and had even tried to go on with his mathematics by himself. Very likely, too, hope sprang eternal in Plato's breast. Who knew but there was still a chance for carrying out the great experiment if only he and Dion could get control once more? In any case he finally gave way. The tyrant sent a warship to fetch him, and for a third time Plato was on his way to Sicily, accompanied, it would seem, by his nephew and several other disciples including Xenocrates. (361 B. C.)

The new journey, however, only repeated the disaster of the preceding trip on a larger scale. At first, Dionysius was enchanted to have his philosopher back, and the group were hospitably received. One of them made a great stir by predicting an eclipse of the sun, and the unworldly Xenocrates created scarcely less astonishment when he declined to keep for himself a golden wreath that he had won as victor in a drinking-



bout. The lessons in mathematics were resumed. But, far from reconciling the tyrant with his uncle, Plato's efforts had the sole effect of arousing his jealousy still further, and of irritating him into the confiscation of Dion's great fortune, hitherto left intact. Angry and disgusted, Plato asked to go home, but Dionysius, having got hold of him at last, would not part with him and insisted on his remaining. A coolness fell between the two, ending in an open quarrel when Plato intervened to save an officer whom the king wished to make the scapegoat for a mutiny among the troops. He passed a miserable year virtually a prisoner in the palace garden. The army, to which reform of any sort was anathema, hated him and even threatened his life. At this point the Tarentine government intervened, and Archytas made representations as a result of which the philosopher was allowed to leave. He landed in the Peloponnesus in July 360 B. C., met Dion at the Olympic Games, and with him returned once more to Athens.

Plato was now sixty-seven years old, but he still had thirteen years to live and teach and write. Such of the "critical" dialogues as had not been written before the last Sicilian trip belong to this final period, and to them were added the *Timaeus* and the unfinished *Critias* designed to supplement the *Republic*, and finally the *Laws*, and, if it be genuine, the *Epinomis*.<sup>33</sup> He had also other works in mind, as, for example, a dialogue to be called the *Philosopher*, to carry on the thought of the *Sophist* and *Politicus*, and another to complete the trilogy to which the *Timaeus* and *Critias* were designed to belong. And he perhaps carried on, for a time at least, a philosophical correspondence with Dionysius, who, in spite of their late unpleasantness, seems still to have asked his advice. But he was not pleased when the tyrant wrote a book that claimed to expound his views.

Politically, he was done with Syracuse. But he could not escape looking on awhile at the progress of the tragedy for which he was in part responsible. Dionysius had heaped insult upon injury on Dion by following up the confiscation of his property with the dissolution of his marriage, and had remar-

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Raeder, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

ried the unfortunate wife to a favorite of his own. All hope of a reconciliation was over, and Dion saw that there was no alternative between energetic retaliation and a tame submission. For three years he nursed his wrath and prepared his revenge, rallying to his cause, apparently with Plato's silent consent if not approbation, a number of friends from the Academy, among whom we may mention Speusippus, Eudemus, an intimate friend of Aristotle's, destined never to return, and one Callippus, a trusted comrade but later the Judas of the band. With them and some eight hundred mercenaries he set sail in August, 357 B. C. He was driven far south of his course almost to the African coast, and thus slipped by Dionysius and Philistus, who had expected him to come *via* Italy and were waiting for him there. In Sicily there were none to oppose and many to welcome him, and his march on the capital from the southern shore where he landed was a triumphal progress swollen by new adherents from every side. All Syracuse acclaimed him, with the exception of the citadel which was still held by Dionysius' troops. The letter is still extant, though its authenticity is disputed, that Plato is supposed to have written him, congratulating him upon his victory, warning him against too great haughtiness and inflexibility in the hour of triumph, and begging him to remember his education and rule as one trained at the Academy should.

The victory, however, was short-lived, and the next turn in events was such as to bring shame and sorrow upon Plato. Dionysius, to be sure, was soon disposed of, and, after a crushing defeat in which Philistus was killed, fled to Italy. But Dion could not cope with intrigue and treachery at home, and after a brief and precarious tenure he fell, stabbed by his trusted adviser and fellow Academician, Callippus. For a year Callippus maintained himself in power, and then was driven out by Dion's friends, eventually himself to fall by the knife. The episode could not but bring the Academy into disrepute and afford ground for the reproach that it bred tyrants and backbiters, and Plato, apart from the grief caused him by the loss of Dion, must have felt the scandal keenly. Nevertheless, he seems to have been still ready to give an opinion as to the

best form of government for Syracuse, when Dion's avengers turned to him for counsel. His advice, however, was too sensible and generous to be followed.<sup>34</sup> A period of anarchy ensued, and the government changed hands three times, falling at last into the clutches of Dionysius again, in 346 B. C. But it was not for long. The tyrant was immediately shut up by the combined forces of Leontini and Carthage within the walls of the city that detested him—till all three were sent packing by the genius of the Corinthian general, Timoleon, who had been despatched by the mother city in response to the frantic appeals of the Syracusans for help against their foes both within and without. Dionysius retired to Corinth, where, after a long life of exile, he finally ended his days. He had turned schoolmaster and mendicant priest, and his eccentricities and his real wit made him one of the sights of the city, scarcely less noteworthy than that other monument, Diogenes. Timoleon set Syracuse on her feet again, and governed wisely and well, and, had Plato only lived to see the day, he might have felt that at last the city from which he had hoped so much and met with such disappointment was ruled as he would wish it.

But he had been dead for ten years, and the concluding scenes of the drama—the brief reinstatement and final deposition of Dionysius, and the coming of Timoleon—were played after he had left the audience. His last days—he died in 347 B. C. at the age of eighty—had been serene and happy except for his distress at the assassination of Dion and the treachery of Callippus. He had made a great name for himself, not only as a philosopher, but as a teacher, a political adviser, and an expert in statesmanship, to whom legislators and rulers turned for advice; and the school that he had founded had become the foremost centre of learning in all the Greek world. Also, besides this public reputation, thirty years or more of teaching had laid up for him a vast private treasure of affection and respect, the gift of many generations of pupils. Physically and mentally he was still active and alert, and instead of resting on his laurels he had gone on to the end with

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 299, § 223.



his literary work and the direction of the Academy. Indeed, Cicero tells us that he died in harness, writing.<sup>35</sup> But we need not take this statement so literally as to exclude another story that death came on him swiftly and gently one day, when he was the guest at the marriage feast of a friend.

<sup>35</sup> Cicero, *De Senectute*, V, 13.

## CHAPTER V

### PLATONIC LOVE

#### I.

IN turning at last to consider the Platonic philosophy we shall do well to loiter awhile before the newly discovered portrait, supposedly of Socrates, which we were discussing in the second chapter. As we have already remarked, it is almost the replica of a painting hitherto and, for that matter, still commonly believed to represent Plato in his prime, and if it be really Socratic instead of Platonic, our estimate of Platonism must undergo considerable revision. Indeed, it leaves us to the comparatively "professional" features of the picture that looks down upon us from the later, critical dialogues for our only trustworthy likeness of Plato as he really was. If this be the true man, we should have considerably contracted the present chapter and treated more at length in connection with Socrates much that we are now about to take up.

That we are holding in our treatment of Plato to the traditional and more conservative hypothesis need not imply, however, any enmity to the new view or more than an attitude of benevolent neutrality in the controversy. As non-partisan spectators, it is not for us to take sides. But the features about to be discussed have to be dealt with under the one heading or the other. And while the point is still so disputed and the issue so in doubt, it is more discreet for us to accept as a working basis the attribution that not only is usual and popular but also has a great weight of expert opinion behind it. To the mere recorder and recounter of philosophic gossip like ourselves this course has the further advantage of allowing us to varnish our account of Plato with what has generally been regarded as most characteristically Platonic.

Moreover, granted that the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, the *Republic*, and the *Phaedrus* depict the true Socratic doctrine, the portrait, in the case of two men philosophically so closely related, may well be a good likeness of both. Certainly the impression the casual reader gets from these dialogues is that, although they may "profess to be the pictures of a generation that had passed away," they nevertheless set forth a philosophy that Plato, whether or not he originated it, has pondered deeply, accepted whole-heartedly, and made an integral part of his own system, for the time being at least.<sup>1</sup> We are then justified, I think, in having as a matter of convenience postponed to the present chapter a more detailed study of the painting whose salient features we have already noted. But we ought perhaps at this point to apologize for a certain amount of awkward repetition that our course will involve. The theory of Ideas, the doctrines of immortality and of knowledge as recollection, the unworldly and mystical elements in the Platonic point of view, will all turn up again in their old familiar guise, and much of what they have to tell us we shall have heard before. Still, some tales will bear telling twice, and it will not waste our time to give these points a rehearing. Moreover, taken in conjunction with Plato's later writings they assume a new significance which they lack if regarded as Socrates pure and simple.

There is another moot point, bound up with these considerations, that we ought to dodge, but with respect to which we shall be obliged to commit ourselves to some provisional hypothesis—the question whether and, if so, to what extent Plato changed his views as he grew older. This problem has given rise to very great differences of opinion ranging from assertion of complete alteration to equally positive convictions of no essential change. Upon the merits of the dispute we fortunately do not have to pass. But here again we must adopt a working hypothesis—which had perhaps better be the safe middle course of assuming a development in Plato's thought, even if there were no *volte-face*. For no critic, however staunch a defender he may be of the essential unity of the

<sup>1</sup> But cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 212–213, § 162.



Platonic system, would maintain that it sprang from Plato's mind in one brilliant moment as full-fledged as Athene from the head of Zeus, or that it did not remain till the end an object of incessant meditation, to which he was always giving a final touch. Even after the period of essential formulation was over, there would still have been objections to answer, unexpected difficulties to meet, and frequent opportunity for extension and correction. Here, the theory of knowledge needed amendment, there, the good required more accurate definition. Or the thorny points of the status of the Forms and of their relation to particular objects might prove annoying from time to time. We shall suppose, then, that the Platonic system grew and had a history, and therefore can be traversed in easy stages. These stages, again, we shall make two, not arbitrarily and merely for convenience's sake, but in view of the fact that the Dialogues fall, roughly speaking, into two groups different enough in style and tone to raise at least a question and arouse a controversy regarding their relations. Accepting this cleavage with all due reserve, we may begin by discussing the doctrine set forth in the early and the so-called "constructive" dialogues—which, it will be recalled, is maintained by some critics to be Socratic rather than Platonic. After that, we may go on to note the further extensions and revisions proposed in the later "critical" group, remembering always that, if these same critics be right, this group is Plato's only really original and systematic writing. In the course of our journey we can examine at closer hand the difficulties and controversies whose outlines we have already descried from afar.

## II

The genius of Plato, like that of Shakespeare, does not lie in inventing new plots but in an intuition of the possibilities lurking in old stories. His philosophy gave no unexpected and spectacular twist to the current of Greek thought. It only, like some sudden pool in a mountain stream, gathered up all the divided and criss-cross rivulets of previous speculation and made for a space their confused waters one and clear and deep.

Into it poured both the unchanging Logos of Heracleitus and the sparkling change-whipped Flux tinted with its forerunning of Protagorean skepticism and relativism; the indivisible, unalterable, and colorless substance of the Eleatic One; the Pythagorean Forms and Numbers and the doctrine of pre-existence and rebirth; the "Mind" of Anaxagoras; the Socratic Universals; and the Megaric teaching that the Socratic Good is identical with Eleatic Being;—not to speak of traces of more indirect seepage from Empedocles and the Ionians.

It would doubtless be safer to work towards the Platonic system along one of these contributory streams, the broadest and deepest of which is the Heracleitean philosophy. The Flux was one of the first things to catch Plato's eye and fire his imagination, and it remained for him, till the end, along with variety and multiplicity, an outstanding characteristic of the material world. And the Logos needed little more than a filling of Pythagorean Forms and Socratic Universals, each tagged with the attributes of Parmenidean Being, to become the realm of Platonic Ideas. But there is another way, more fascinating, though more hazardous, of approaching Plato. We may deliberately ignore the preceding development of philosophy just to see whether his system, when blocked off from the currents of thought that fed it, might not have still welled up spontaneously from an uninstructed and unbiased meditation upon the world. This plan has the advantage of enabling us to chance upon him simply and solely through our own experience. We shall be tracing the growth of his doctrine in the history of our own difficulties and speculations, and we shall find in him the outcome, not so much of his predecessors', as of our own philosophizing. We take a great poetic license, to be sure, in turning ourselves into Platos, however mute and inglorious, and in making him one of us. Still the risk is worth running, and Plato, or at any rate Socrates, would be the first to forgive us our attempt to bring a philosophy to birth from an intercourse of question and answer within ourselves.

Nor do we break so sharply with history after all. We shall rather see that the current of our speculations flows on

the whole parallel to it, just as the gestation of the human embryo recapitulates the stages through which the human species has evolved from its protoplasmic origins. For the first steps of everyone's independent thinking are apt to flounder in a Heracleitean flux. The old authorities and sanctions crumble in an initial flood of skepticism, and we find ourselves immersed in a Protagorean sense of the relativity and instability of all standards, beliefs, institutions, and ideals. We despair of truth and any fixed and enduring good. We mourn the irrecoverable beauty of Helen. We bewail the swiftness of all-devouring time, and the shortness and futility of our individual lives hurried so quickly to their end. We foretell the doom of our race sinking with its aging earth and failing sun to slow extinction or, it may be, hurled to violent death somewhere in the immensities of space, leaving no memorial or trace of itself behind, and having lived, it might seem, in vain. To say all in a word, for us as for the great Stoic emperor, oppressed by the same Heracleitean vision of ceaseless change, "Everything that belongs to the soul is a dream and vapor, and life is a warfare and a stranger's sojourn, and after fame is oblivion."<sup>2</sup>

Still, the fact remains that, however plausible the Sophistic relativity and agnosticism may be, we can never succeed in behaving as if it were true. We may be convinced of it in theory, we may defend and even urge it, but we always lack the courage of our convictions when it comes to the test of practice. Gorgias and Protagoras themselves, as we saw, were in their conduct pillars of the established order, natural, moral, and social, which their teaching left without a leg to stand on. Nor is the reason far to seek. Life, however much we may argue with it, stubbornly refuses to be lived as if it were a flux and nothing more. In fact and action it defies our logic and cannot be dissuaded from seeming to have structure and coherence. It may be that its substance is ceaseless change and movement, and that both the film of becoming and the screen of sense are being unrolled at a speed too quick for thought to overtake, but the fact remains that the picture cast by the one upon the

<sup>2</sup> Aurelius, *Med.*, II, 17 (trans. Long).



other is fixed and persistent and not too flickering for the mind to imagine in it a scene and a plot with a consistent history. In short, there is something, even if it be only illusion, that redeems our experience from the chaos and delirium it logically ought to be, and gives to it the value and meaning of a rational life in a stable and enduring world.

Now, unless we have been made too giddy watching the flux through the Sophists' eyes, we may begin in time to grow skeptical of our skepticism and to wonder a little about this inexplicable semblance of stability in ourselves and our world. We may still distrust it and feel that it can have no real basis, but we may at least be tempted to investigate and analyze it. And the moment we do so, we shall find that we are after all only following in Socrates' footsteps. For we shall note that the surface of the stream of change and becoming is, after all, not utterly boiling and confused, but is everywhere pitted with eddies, each one of which occurs at a given place from which it is never moved by the swirling current, and has a constant shape and size that are never altered by the rush of the waters that it is forever sucking in and disgorging again with such incredible rapidity. Moreover, we shall also note that not a drop in the torrent of existence escapes these whirlpools. The whole flow passes through them and is divided up among them, and the content discharged by one is immediately appropriated by another. Thus, throughout its entire length and breadth the straightaway plunge of time and change is deflected and broken up and arrested by a myriad fixed points of reference and classification, about some one of which every bit of our experience, however fleeting, is visibly revolving at any given moment. Our experience, instinctively it might seem, recognizes likeness and difference in its hurrying content, remembers the old and contrasts or associates it with the new, tags each event as it comes, and puts it in the same class with something else. Individual things come and go in an unremitting process of generation and dissolution, but the forms they take on, the natures they assume, remain without any alteration or shadow of turning, undisturbed by their passing. The beauty of Helen long since perished from the earth, but the face that un-

veiled itself in her still launches, generation after generation, its thousand ships. And though you and I die and are seen no more, the human form which we have embodied for a moment, each in his own way, does not disappear when we are destroyed, but goes on manifesting itself in those that come after us, so long as mankind shall last.

Here, finally, we seem to have found the secret of the law and order and rationality in our experience. It lies in just these common properties and values which, by linking up and uniting great masses of data swirling at random throughout space and time, give us a kind of map or chart of the stream of sensation, and enable us to distinguish, locate, and classify its contents. Indeed, without these groupings and generalizations experience could not even coagulate into the lumps of sensation we call *things*, for it is impossible to have a thing that is not also some *kind* of thing. Were it not, then, for this tendency in events to proceed along certain definite lines and formulate themselves in certain invariable ways, life would be sheer madness without even the method of a mania, and the universe would be utter anarchy and chaos.

But there is something else, too, that might strike us about this tendency of experience to sort out and classify its material and cast it into forms. It is not a neutral and mechanical process. It is rather something that experience seems to be wanting and trying to achieve, or in other words, an ideal that experience is intent on realizing. For instance, if an event presents itself that is not wholly true to a type of some sort, and that refuses for the moment to be classified in all respects, the mind is all of a flurry with uneasiness and irritation, and falls to brooding and puzzling till a place has been found for it. And then the instant the thing has been tagged we heave a sigh of relief at having, as we say, finally *explained* the thing and at now *knowing* what it is. Experience, that is, looks as if it were always trying to read some sort of meaning into itself as it moves. It imagines itself, at any rate, to be all sorts of things, flowers and birds and beasts, men and Gods, wooded hills and flashing streams, blue seas and blue skies, the bright host of heaven, and even cyclone after cyclone of atoms

or electrons storming in unseen space. And the forms to which its imaginings keep reverting in this effort to make itself articulate and mean something have the value for it of a *truth* that it is striving to tell about its real nature.

But the suffusion of experience with this curious phosphorescence of "interest," "meaning," and "value" is even more striking in other phases of life than it is in the "love" of truth, the discomfort of the unexplained, and the comfort of knowledge. Sense data not only rush on and off the stage insisting that they *are* something, and demanding that, as we wish to be easy in our minds, we shall at once recognize *what* they are. Many of them also troop in lamenting and weeping, writhing in agony, objects of instinctive disgust and loathing, or, it may be, laughing and rejoicing, kindlers of hot desire, things of beauty which are a joy forever. This heavy charge of pain and pleasure, content and discontent, attraction and repulsion, borne by the crude flow of experience, electrifies the mind and provokes new groupings, not only of individual things but of whole classes, according as they are found desirable or undesirable, beautiful or ugly, morally good or morally bad. Thus, besides the general concepts responsive to the scientific interest in knowing what things are, there appear a host of other forms with which experience marks its moral or aesthetic disapproval of things as they stand, and expresses its ideals of what a world remoulded in conformity with its desires would be like. In fact, these would probably be the first forms to catch our eye and in any case to engage us in philosophic meditation. Knowledge of the truth is notoriously less alluring than that of good and evil. Such homely groups as cats and dogs, lamp-posts and stars, houses and motor cars, we are apt to take for granted, and the further analysis of their contents into the forms discovered by science is not half so interesting as thinking over the problems of human conduct and trying out the proper nature of right and wrong. At least, so Socrates and the youthful Plato found it.

And so, by our own road and at our own pace, discovering by the way the Logos in the Heracleitean flux, we have caught up with Socrates, and can now understand his hope of finding



beneath the intricacy, the vacillation, and the seeming relativity of human behavior certain general principles of conduct which, once unearthed, would prove to be the foundations of a universal and authoritative moral order. By much the same road Plato, too, appears to have reached a like conclusion. He had been led to the waters of Heracleiteanism and Sophistic skepticism by Cratylus, his first instructor in philosophy, and if he could not be made to drink, it was in part the hand of Socrates that had restrained him. We shall not be surprised then to find him puzzling with Socrates in his earlier dialogues over moral qualities like courage<sup>3</sup> and temperance<sup>4</sup> and piety<sup>5</sup> and justice,<sup>6</sup> and tending always to the belief that the common names applied to the various instances of the virtue in question implied the existence of a common nature or form of which these instances were concrete manifestations and to which they owed their special cast. Nor was it more than a step to the opinion that there might be an essence of virtue in general which enabled us to detect in such different flavors as, say, courage and temperance, a common odor of sanctity.<sup>7</sup>

But we must also have realized by this time that these glimpses of fixity in the flux do not herald an end to our journey. They only announce its beginning, and prophesy its difficulty and its length. In the first place our Sophist friends and their Cynic and Cyrenaic disciples are still standing by, whispering that these seeming eddies in the flow of sense, which give it an apparent structure, are not really there at all, but are optical illusions pure and simple. Nay more, they would say, although it is certain that we are all only "seeing things," there is no reason to suppose that the hallucination is collective and that, when we all suddenly cry out "cat" or "dog," what you see resembles what I see. Common names, then, have not even a fictitious reality or validity.

It is plain that, if we are to move on, we must deal in some way with these paralyzing doubts. And when we come to Plato's ethics and theory of knowledge we shall find him

<sup>3</sup> The *Laches*.

<sup>4</sup> The *Charmides*.

<sup>5</sup> The *Crito* and *Euthyphro*.

<sup>6</sup> *Rep. I.*

<sup>7</sup> The *Protagoras*.

greatly exercised to refute the Protagorean skepticism. But after we have quieted our scruples on this score, we are not much forwarder, as we shall discover, for all our pains. Granting that the forms appearing in experience are not optical illusions, but are really there, how do they get there? The flux itself, which is through and through fluid, impermanent, and incomprehensibly swift in changing, cannot explain them. There is nothing in the inward sweep and glide of its current to account for the eddies which break up and retard its movement and set its contents revolving monotonously about fixed points. Nor is there anything in the mere occurrence and flow of sense-data to tell us why experience finds meaning and value in them and classifies them under certain invariable types. It looks very much, then, as if the flux were being interfered with from the outside, and as if we should have to take a new factor into consideration in order to understand why it assumes the shapes it does. Nor should we be too precocious if we had already come to share Plato's suspicions on this score. The behavior of the stream, we might feel, was due to the existence and nature of some sort of bed over which it was flowing. And might not the unvarying pattern that mottled its restless, hurrying surface with persistent shapes and colors be just an opaque and distorted vision of that bed, refracted from its depths? Where then we perceive forms and values and meanings in the passing show of sense-data, we are perhaps beholding not something superficial, but the deepest and most essential things in the universe. We may be actually seeing down through the unstable, gliding substance of phenomena to a world of eternal and unchanging types and laws, good at all times and in all places, which underlies the flux and constitutes the immutable foundation and bed-rock of Reality.

But before leaping to this conclusion we shall do well to look once more and in greater detail at these habits of knowing and loving which we find in ourselves. If we study them more at length, we may be spared the trouble of so long a jump, and may be able to confirm our suspicion, step by step, in an orderly and leisurely way. Let us pause then for a moment

and ask ourselves just what we do mean by knowledge and by love, and what their implications are. And let us, being human, take love first.

## III

We shall get most quickly to the heart of this curious phenomenon of attraction and desire in experience, if we approach it as Plato did, on its most familiar and engaging side—the love that men bear one another. Nor can we study it more agreeably and to the point than by listening with him in the *Symposium* to the talk at the famous dinner party given by the poet Agathon, where Socrates, we may remember, showed how good a head he had for something besides philosophy. Among the other guests were Pausanias and Phaedrus, both prominent men about town with a pretty taste for literature and speculation, the physician Erixymachus, one of the best known doctors in Athens, and the great comic poet, Aristophanes—so that the conversation was bound to be many-sided and lively. And it lasted, encouraged by the equivalent of an excellent champagne dinner, till the small hours of the morning, when Alcibiades, very much in his cups, chanced in with a band of revellers and put an end to the discussion by turning the occasion into a drinking-bout from which Socrates emerged victorious.

In an earlier dialogue, the *Lysis*, Plato had considered the nature of friendship, and though he had reached no definite conclusions, he had apparently felt that the subject was of considerable philosophic interest. Indeed, he had intimated that the desire of friends for each other and the sense of fulfilment they enjoy when united must be regarded as part of a more essential yearning, deep-rooted in human nature, to embrace some final and absolute good, loved in and for itself, the possession of which alone brings true happiness and peace. In the *Symposium* the hint dropped in the *Lysis* is picked up and examined once more in an ascending series of speeches about the nature and meaning of love. The young Phaedrus sets the ball rolling with a rather fulsome and rhetorical encomium—a Platonic dig perhaps at the oratorical



affectations inculcated by the Sophists—in which he points out the inestimable benefits conferred by the oldest of all the Gods, the courage and shame of every unworthy act and thought that love inspires in lover and beloved alike, and the heroic deeds of self-sacrifice that have been performed in its name and to its glory. Pausanias, who follows, is more critical, though still in the Sophist manner. Seizing upon a distinction already made by Greek mythology, and thanks largely to his discourse forever after famous in European art and literature, he points out that there are two Aphrodites, an heavenly and an earthly, or, as it has come down to us, a sacred and a profane love. The one is fickle, sensual, and unscrupulous, and must be condemned. But the other, the sacred, in which the sexual base is transfigured and the affections are centred upon the mind and character of the beloved rather than upon his body, is pure and honorable and benefits lover and beloved alike. The turn then passes to the doctor Erixymachus, who extends Pausanias' distinction to the realm of physics and physiology, remarking the difference in desires between the healthy and the diseased organism, and attributing "acts of God" like storm, and pestilence, and famine, to the working of forces akin to the lower love. And after him comes Aristophanes, who dwells upon the restlessness and the wanting that make love so imperious and so unhappy, and points out, partly in earnest and partly in jest, why the lover feels that he is discovering and completing his own true self when he meets and possesses the beloved. In the beginning, he tells us, each human being was double, a pair of Siamese twins, as it were, welded together into a sort of ball with four legs and arms and two faces. In some the two halves were of the same sex, in others male and female were conjoined. Zeus, fearing the strength and agility of these creatures, cut them in two, and had the halves rearranged in our present human form. But we all carry with us the scar of this ancient severance, and we wander about the world restless and aching, looking for our lost halves. And not until we have found and embraced them are we really healed and "rounded out" and complete again. After this fashion—curiously prophetic in some ways

of the trend of our psychology of sex to-day—Aristophanes explains love in its three forms, of man for woman, and of members of the same sex for one another, and also the yearning to unite and fuse with the beloved, which is its essence. The modern young man, then, we may remark in passing, is really an unconscious classicist when he sings “There’s only one girl in the world for me,” or “God made thee mine,” or when, after he has got her, he calls her, for a while at least, his “better half.”

The stage has now been set for the entrance of Socrates. The previous speakers have suggested that love is the sign of a radical want in our natures, and has as its object something that complements and perfects them. In addition, Pausanias with his distinction between the earthly and the heavenly love has intimated that this object is to be found not in the flux of sense—which provokes only impotent desire and gives satiety instead of satisfaction—but in something immaterial and unchanging, or, as we to-day might say, spiritual. At least, no true and abiding happiness can be had from a love that does not fare beyond the body of the beloved to his soul and desire him for the beauty in him that is unseen. The speech, however, is given its immediate cue by a romantic, fulsome, and inconsequential outburst by Agathon—a deliberate parody, it would seem, of the poet’s ornate and second-rate style—which affords Socrates a chance to intervene with his favorite pastime of question and answer.

Since love is the pursuit of a beauty and a perfection that it does not as yet possess, how can it, he asks, be the wholly divine thing that Agathon would have it? No, love stands halfway rather between God and man. It is born of lacking and of having, is the child of plenty and of want, and it is forever groping and crying for the beauty that irradiates all things, even as reason gropes for the truth in them. It is something far wider and deeper than personal affection; it is the aspiration of the finite, of the partial and the incomplete, towards the ideal that fulfils and perfects it. The “other half,” then, of which Aristophanes was speaking, is really the Good, is that greater and nobler thing, whatever it may be, union with

which realizes our nature and brings us a happiness and peace that the world can neither give nor take away. And this higher beauty we desire to have and to hold forever, and to perpetuate ourselves everlastingly in its embrace—so that all love is also a yearning for immortality. Wherever we look throughout the length and breadth of love, we see this aspiration towards the eternal. What is the primitive rut, which by making living bodies beautiful and desirable to one another drives them to reproduce their kind, but a means of freeing the race from the death that overtakes the individual, and of rendering it comparatively immortal? Or, in the individual himself, take hunger and thirst which drive his body to replenish itself from day to day, and memory which passes on the experience and knowledge contained in each vanishing instant to the next, and thus builds up for him out of quicksand, as it were, a stable character and career. What are these but devices for rescuing him, body and soul, from imprisonment and death in the passing moment, and for giving him some measure of permanence and the immortality of a lifetime at least? And what again is the after-fame for which he strives and is willing, if need be, to die, but an extension of that immortality and a living on of the splendor of his life in the memory and character of those to come? Noble deeds and thoughts are children of the soul, begotten by the highest of all loves, the passion of noble minds for one another, and they redeem us from death and oblivion and make us part of eternity as no mere offspring of our bodies can.

We are now ready, Socrates continues, to be initiated into the final “mystery”—the true inwardness of that self-perpetuation in beauty after which all love, however gross or blind, is really striving. Let us, by way of introduction, recount the steps by which love mounts to its goal. Our first glimpse of beauty, our first thrill of desire, comes, as we have seen, from the charms of a beloved, and the young neophyte should eagerly frequent physical loveliness and undergo the experience of falling in love with a beautiful body. But this is only a beginning. For we shall soon realize that physical beauty is one and the same, no matter in whose charms it manifests itself,



and that the true object of our desires is not a particular body but rather the general quality of loveliness it shares with all other fair forms and faces. And to this more universal and more delicate beauty we shall now lift our eyes and hearts, abating our former infatuation for a single individual and considering it of small account. There is, however, yet another degree of initiation to be taken. There are also beauties of the mind of which we must now become the lovers. Such beauties are far more worthy of affection than mere comeliness, and are to be preferred, in the choice of our beloved, to physical charm. In union with the soul of the beloved we shall beget noble thoughts and learn to love the offspring of the mind—the great laws and institutions and strivings after knowledge in which it perpetuates itself. And finally we shall learn to incline our hearts to pure wisdom in and for itself, and to fix our desires upon the beauty of holiness, by which all great and enduring works are inspired.

We are now at the threshold of the last mystery. Each new beauty that we have perceived and loved in our ascent has after all been relative—the beauty of this thing or that. But what has really attracted us, and what we have loved in them all, has been their common quality of loveliness. The real object of desire, then, can be nothing less than this quality, nothing less than the lovable and the beautiful in itself distilled free of all admixture with any other nature. In other words, it is the abstract form or essence of beauty that is the “other half” and “true love” of all our seeking—beauty “pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life,”<sup>8</sup> but “absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever growing and perishing beauties of all things.”<sup>9</sup>

In the embrace of such a beloved, Socrates concludes, man becomes the friend of God and attains at last to true immortality, so far as this mortal may put it on. Further discussion, to be sure, is cut off by the entrance of Alcibiades, who proceeds to deliver a speech in praise of Socrates before be-

<sup>8</sup> *Symposium*, 211 E.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 211 B.

taking himself still further to his cups. But we have heard enough to be able to guess in what this true immortality, or self-perpetuation of oneself in beauty consists. Plato is not here thinking of personal immortality, but of something far less gross. Personal immortality, the mere going on of the soul after death, would not of itself suffice to rescue her from the flux, since what only continues, even if it go on everlastingly, is still carried on the bosom of time. But in the arms of absolute beauty the soul is lifted in some mystical fashion clear of time altogether. For beauty in itself—not the beauty of this or that, but the pure essence of beauty—can no more be pinned down to a given place or moment than can, for example, mathematical truths. Nor is it affected by the passage of time, or even by the sheer ending of time, any more than the laws of motion, say, move on with a moving body or cease to be valid when all movement stops. Such pure forms and laws hold good for all time, simply because they themselves stand outside of duration altogether. They belong in a world to which time is irrelevant. They are dateless and ageless. In short, they are not everlasting but eternal.

Now in consummating the essence of all desire in the embrace of the pure form of beauty, the soul, Plato feels, is somehow actually assimilated to the eternity of that with which she is united. In her absorption in her object she loses consciousness of herself, of her mortality, and of the passage of time, and becomes, as it were, identical with what she loves. Of this mystical self-forgetfulness and escape from the flux in union with the beloved we may get some faint foreshadowing in our own obliviousness to time and to ourselves, and in our identity with what interests us, when we are lost in an intensely engrossing book or occupation. We almost become the story we are reading, the game we are playing, the problem we are solving. The object of our interest and ourselves are made one thing, as it were, which exists in and for itself in a world where no clock ticks and no shadows lengthen, and where we are for a brief space, in our little way, immortal. How much more splendid, then, the immortality of a soul that has lost herself in the eternal object of all interest and all desire. She

is intent on something that has no beginning, no end, no varying episodes, no leaves to be turned over, no chapters to shift the attention. Moreover, as her beloved is wholly abstracted from the change and multiplicity of the things of sense and from all other natures save its own, so in like measure her union with it is undisturbed by the fringe of bodily sensation and movement, and of noise and color from the outer physical world, by which our pettier fits of abstraction are surrounded and harassed. And since mind and heart are one with the eternal, her life is for her an enactment, as it were, of eternity. The length of her life no longer matters to her. She has forgotten time in identifying herself with the timeless. It is in the quality, not the quantity of existence that immortality consists. Plato observes, to be sure, that the soul exists before birth and survives death. But such continuance would not be a putting off but a mere prolongation of mortality, did she not also worship

"The deathless beauty of her guiding vision  
And learn to love in all things mortal only  
What is eternal."

True immortality, then, does not depend upon a future life. It is a disposition of the soul that may be attained within the limits of our allotted years on earth. For here and now, if only we will, we can rise above our mortality and give to our lives the value of eternity. It is true that freed from the burden of the flesh we may hope to soar more quickly and surely to those heights where there is no question or consciousness of "living on" at all. And it is this hope alone that gives nobility to the idea of survival. Indeed, we might almost say that for Plato personal immortality is simply a last desperate expedient in the series we have already noted for giving the soul a chance to escape from the flux of "living on" and attain the timeless existence of true being.

In another dialogue,<sup>10</sup> Socrates was to discourse once more of love, and in the same vein, lying on the grass with Phaedrus one summer afternoon in the shade of a lofty plane tree by the

<sup>10</sup> The *Phaedrus*.



cool music of the babbling Illissus. The subject of the dialogue is rhetoric, but it is opened by Phaedrus' reciting a speech of his favorite orator, Lysias, in favor of the non-lover rather than the lover as a friend, or, as we should say, of "Platonic" rather than passionate and romantic friendship. Socrates, after bettering the composition with an attack of his own upon the lover, suddenly veers and recants. He, no less than Lysias, has been blaspheming love. Love is really a sort of divine madness, an inspiration from a higher world, like the inspiration of the prophet or the poet, a rite of purgation, a mystery that heals and makes whole. Once again, however, and here Plato reiterates the point made in the *Symposium*, there are two kinds, or perhaps we should better say, two levels of love, a higher and a lower. The soul is like a charioteer driving a pair of horses, one of which is thoroughbred and docile to the guidance of all that is best, the other dark, vicious, and refractory, and ever excited by brute physical attraction and the desire for sensual pleasure. The course habitually begins by the vicious steed bolting in pursuit of bodily satisfaction. But he must be tugged back and disciplined by the soul that would enjoy the only true and satisfying love, of which the other horse with its obedience and steadiness is the symbol. A modicum of happiness and a glimpse of the ideal, to be sure, are to be had from the charms of the beloved's body, and some concession to the flesh is inevitable and not altogether to be condemned. For, we might comment, taking a leaf from the book of Freud, we cannot sublimate a passion unless it first exists, and to refine is not to destroy it. But the vision we get from this lower level is distorted and fitful, and the happiness fleeting, intermittent, and incomplete. Both the lover and the beloved, if they would reach the final goal of their yearning and attain true blessedness, must train the vicious steed to run in harness with its thoroughbred mate, and thus transfigure the lower into the higher love. Then "passing their life here in happiness and harmony—masters of themselves and orderly—enslaving the vicious and emancipating the virtuous elements of the soul,"<sup>11</sup> their love will bear them upward side by side,

<sup>11</sup> *Phaedrus*, 256 A.

without accident or fall, away from the mortality and corruption of the things of sense to the heavenly vision of what they really desire in one another, and to union with its pure and eternal essence.

There is more to the famous allegory in the *Phaedrus* than this, but the rest may well be left till we have examined the inferences drawn by Plato from the reasoning and knowing side of experience. Enough has been said to bring out, in connection with the discussion in the *Symposium*, the implications of love, and of interest and value in general. These implications, we see, make shrewd the suspicion, already half formed in our minds, that the behavior of experience cannot be explained on the supposition that we are dealing merely with a Heraclitean flux. For thought and reflection insist that the true object of love, far from being a sensible and material thing, can logically be found only in an immaterial and abstract essence existing independent of the world of sense and becoming. Furthermore, all our instincts and interests seem calculated to save us from being mired in the flux of matter and change, and, by attaching us to this eternal object, to render us, too, eternal. If this intangible form of beauty, which suffuses all things with the only loveliness they possess, has no real existence but is illusion, then love is indeed blind and deceitful. But, if we cannot trust the plain message of so deep and compelling a part of our experience as loving and valuing, experience is really so meaningless and reasoning so futile that thought and reflection of any sort are vain sound and fury signifying nothing, and that not even Protagoras and the other Sophists have any logical ground for their arguments and conclusions.

Moreover, Plato thought, it was not so difficult after all to find some sense in love and believe in the real existence of the suprasensible object to which it pointed. From the Eleatics and the Megarics he had already learned that Reality must be one, simple, indivisible, homogeneous, unchanging, without beginning or end, and his friend Euclid had gone on to argue that only Socrates' abstract Form of the Good lived up to these specifications. However that might be, it was obvious that im-

material and universal natures like that of goodness in itself or beauty in itself rang perfectly true when submitted to the Eleatic test. Particular objects, on the other hand, being multiple, conglomerate, unstable, and subject to birth and change and death, failed to live up to the definition, and therefore, despite their seeming solidity, must be regarded as comparatively spurious and unreal. For all, then, that individual things were so warm, so lovely, and so alluring, their tangible beauty along with their other material attributes collapsed at the first prick of logic, leaving as its real stuff an immaterial essence. Instead of its being far-fetched to believe in the real existence of an abstract and universal Form of beauty, it was only common sense and sweet reasonableness. Nay more, that was the only beauty in the real existence of which one could believe with any reason. Love, in a word, was not blind. It had the eye as well as the wings of an eagle, and its bow, though bent on a mark higher than the stars, was aimed at truth.



## CHAPTER VI

### PLATO'S ETHICS AND POLITICS

#### I

IF we reflect upon the language that we have used about love, we shall realize that we have been talking all along with a double or even triple meaning, and quite broadly at that. Not only have very suggestive words like "logic" and "reason" and "truth" been continually creeping into our vocabulary, but we have also frequently spoken of the discipline of love as if it were a "moral" process, and of the goal at which love is aimed as if it were a "good" in which the soul found "happiness." In the circumstances, these terms insinuate only too plainly that the distinction we made some pages back between love and knowledge is unnatural, and that the two are in reality intimately connected. After all, the desire to know is a passion for what we call the truth about a thing, and conversely the truth about beauty, that is, beauty in itself, is also the object of love in its narrower romantic sense. Knowledge, to be sure, is more promiscuous in its desires, since it seeks to possess the true nature not only of the beautiful but of all things. Its object, as we have already hinted, includes the abstract and universal Forms and Laws that explain *all* the characteristics and behavior of sensible things, whatever their "moral" and "aesthetic" values may be. Still, the "scientific" yearning to comprehend even ugliness and evil is an interest, nay, a passion, the satisfaction of which has a sweetness for the thinker akin to the consummation of love in the embrace of absolute beauty. Or, to put it the other way round, the truth, whether it be about the "morally" good, bad, or indifferent, has an intrinsic value, a loveliness of its own, for the sake of which it is pursued. It is then, no great leap from the subject of love to that of knowledge.

But it is even less of a jump to ethics. Love of a good of some sort, real or supposed, the yearning to remould the world according to the heart's desire, the passion for happiness—all these are the driving forces of human behavior and of "moral" conduct. And the loves that make the every-day world of our homely relations and activities go round somehow seem nearer and warmer than the scientific and philosophical love of truth whose nakedness looks a little chilly. We are notoriously more interested in ethics than in theories of knowledge. So, being still human and self-indulgent, and disposed to eat dessert first, let us postpone dealing with the nature and implications of scientific thinking till we have discussed Plato's moral theory and seen where it leads us. We shall find, moreover, that in so doing we are by no means slighting knowledge. In fact it will prove to be a sort of Siamese twin of morals, and there will be no getting rid of it. But we shall be all the better equipped eventually to turn to it for having treated ethics first. In fact, in taking up morals we are only coming back to our starting point, for we may remember that it was a consideration of moral qualities that first steadied us when we were drifting towards the relativism of the Sophists, and that set us on the track of the Platonic Ideas.

This intimate association of a theory of knowledge with a system of morals will not surprise us so much if we reflect that Plato was steeped in the intellectual and rationalizing spirit of Greek ethics in general, and fell heir to the Socratic teaching that virtue is knowledge, that no one does wrong intentionally, and that vice arises from ignorance of the true good. This teaching he accepted with some enlargement and modification in the early dialogues. In the *Ion*, we find emotion and inspiration discarded in favor of knowledge and insight as a guide to artistic creation and, by implication, to right conduct. In the *Apology* the impossibility of doing evil intentionally is reasserted.<sup>1</sup> In the *Laches* and the *Charmides* we have already seen apparently distinct and different virtues like courage and temperance both reduced, on analysis, to knowledge of what is truly good and truly evil. And in the *Crito*, where Socrates

<sup>1</sup> 25 D-26 A.

refuses to evade an unjust condemnation at the price of disobedience to the law, the superiority of this knowledge to every other influence and consideration is indicated in what might seem an almost quixotic manner.

The *Protagoras* pushes home the doctrine that the seemingly different virtues are really one and that their common and uniting bond is knowledge of the good. This is accomplished under the guise of an attack upon the opposed, Sophist teaching that the virtues are many and have no common principle. The dialogue takes the form of a discussion between Socrates and Protagoras, and the scene is laid in the house of one Cleinias, a rich Athenian, who is putting up the famous teacher during his stay in Athens. Thither Socrates is dragged from his bed early one morning by a young friend and aspirant for the new knowledge, to see and listen to the great Sophist. The debate is on when Protagoras claims that he can make his pupils better day by day by teaching them virtue. Socrates doubts whether virtue can be taught. If it can, why do the Athenians, who recognize in other things the difference between the taught and the untaught, allow the government to be run by all alike, without reference to skill and without reproach of ignorance? Surely it must be on the assumption that virtue is unteachable. Or again, why have good men so often bad sons and friends, who seem unable to profit by their teaching?<sup>2</sup>

These suspicions, however, are quickly allayed by Protagoras' reply. All men are not endowed with skill in the different arts, but all have been given virtue and political wisdom enough to help govern. Again, all procedure against crime is based upon the assumption that virtue can be taught. Punishment is for the purpose of prevention and correction, not for vengeance. The very fact, too, of education points to the same conclusion. Education is a process of instilling virtue. All men—not no men—are its teachers.<sup>3</sup>

Socrates, seemingly worsted, shifts his ground. Are the virtues one or many? Many, replies Protagoras, like the parts of the face, different from one another, and each with its special

<sup>2</sup> 318-320 B.

<sup>3</sup> 322 D-328 C.



function. This position Socrates takes by a strategy of attrition. Different virtues are shown, one by one, to have the same opposite, folly, and therefore themselves to be the same, till courage alone holds out unreduced.<sup>4</sup> After a short lull, Socrates reopens the attack with a flanking movement, which results not only in the capture of the strong point in question, but in rendering one of the Sophists' main positions untenable. Are not pleasure and pain, he asks, the real good and evil? Protagoras demurs from so extreme a conclusion. He would feel safer in saying that there are some pleasant things that are not good, and some painful things that are not evil. But, persists Socrates, painful goods are only regarded as good because they bring more pleasure in the long run, and pleasures are only considered evil when their consequences are painful. The good, then, is the most possible pleasure when all is said and done. With this Protagoras, though hesitant, is in accord. But how are we to estimate the balance of enjoyment and to distinguish the present pleasures and pains that go to swell that balance from those that tend to overdraw it? Surely only by the use of knowledge and wisdom. But what is courage except action in the light of just such wisdom? Is it not precisely knowing what pains and pleasures are for the best in the long run, and hence are not to be feared? Its essence, then, must be the same as that of the other virtues.<sup>5</sup>

The two adversaries, as Socrates himself points out, have changed places during the argument.<sup>6</sup> The ground, indeed, has been dug from beneath both of Protagoras' feet, for he has contradicted himself twice over. In his eagerness to prove to Socrates that virtue can be taught, he has all but admitted that it is one and universal, an identical aptitude implanted in the breasts of all mankind. And his assertion that virtue is many, not one, has been shown to imply that it is unteachable.

The dialogue, however, for all its sleight of hand and the lightness with which Protagoras is let down, is a smashing attack upon the Sophists. When Protagoras is represented

<sup>4</sup> 329 C-335 A.

<sup>5</sup> 349 A-360 E.

<sup>6</sup> 361 A.

as recoiling from the idea that unqualified pleasure is the good, and as doubtful even whether a balance of pleasure in the long run is quite respectable, Sophist relativism, on its moral side at least, is reduced to an absurdity. The individual moment is not the measure of all things, after all. The good proves to be not that which appears good at the instant, but that which is weighed and tested by knowledge and reason as good in the long run. It is only the fool who plays the Sophist by looking no further than immediate gratification or discomfort. The wise man, the philosopher, is just the man who does not accept the present at its face value but measures it by some larger standard. The Cyrenaics, we may remember, closely as they tried to stick to the pleasure of the moment in constructing their ethics, had been forced to the same conclusion, and in aiming conduct at a balance of pleasure, they, too, had given away the case.

For a balance of pleasure is a moral principle, whether or not it be a satisfactory one, and to admit a moral principle of any sort makes all the difference. It is to recognize the authority of reflection over impulse, and the superior validity and reality of the counsels of reason to the reports of the senses. The possession of such a standard raises the individual above the stream of momentary caprice and solicitation and turns his life from a flight of scattered and quarrelsome desires and indulgences into a moral order, a career organized about an ideal. But a moral principle, whatever it may be, bears all the earmarks of the Platonic Form, so hated by the Sophists, Cynics, and Cyrenaics alike. It is discovered by using one's reason, not by listening to sensation. It is abstract and universal. It is something fixed, stable, and, as it were, eternal in the midst of the ebb and flow of passing pleasures and pains. Some of these it accepts and makes instances of the good, as any form recognizes and covers the new examples of itself hatched from instant to instant by experience. Others it drives away as alien, indifferent, doubtful, or evil. Standards may differ and change, of course, in what they permit or demand, but, whatever they may countenance, they are general rules, forms, ideals of conduct. They always mean that

behavior, whatever it is like, is no longer haphazard and sentimental, but is guided by a rational resolve. If they did not, they would not be standards.

Plato, then, in arguing that the good was a balance of pleasure, had, without moving off the Sophists' premises, simply driven piles through their quicksand, and found beneath it a sure bottom of Forms. Henceforth he had nothing to fear from their doubts. To have a right to a principle of some sort was all he required, and that by their own confession he had. Even if the one at hand proved only provisional and had to be discarded, it was sufficient to establish ethics on a firm foundation in the midst of the flux. He had taken the first step, and the one that costs, towards showing that conduct, like love, is a means of redeeming the soul from the flux and uniting her with the eternal. The rest of the way could be pursued in security and at leisure.

But the *Protagoras* takes more than the preliminary measures for finding in action and behavior the saving grace and the value of eternity which, as we have already seen, lurks in the flux of our affections. It also hints at what the final steps will be. When Socrates is converted to Protagoras' view that virtue can be taught, he is converted with a difference. He has drawn Protagoras to the verge of arguing that virtue can be taught because it is innate and latent in every man and only needs the stimulus of education to become explicit. In these circumstances Plato is only too glad to concede the Sophists' point. Virtue is not an artificial adjunct but a constitutional peculiarity of human life. It exists not by convention, but is an inborn propensity. Teaching it is not the grafting of something external and alien, but, to resort to the Socratic metaphor, a bringing to birth of something with which the mind is always pregnant. In a word, virtue is not the illegitimate progeny of a mind constrained against its inclination by the force of oppressive and artificial circumstance. It is a lawful offspring of the soul, the child of a love marriage, which Plato will presently describe, with a true and abiding good. It is to lead up to this point, and to inveigle Protagoras into almost admitting the legitimacy of virtue, that the discussion of its



teachableness is perhaps designed. In itself the question would be purely academic and of little importance.

What Plato hints in the *Protagoras*, he states openly and insistently in the *Meno*. Virtue is an inborn, not an acquired characteristic. The dialogue opens with the old query, can virtue be taught? to which, we may say at once, no conclusive answer is given. But it affords Socrates an opportunity to put the crucial question, what is virtue? For a time the argument moves over somewhat the same ground as that in the *Protagoras*. Virtue is not one thing in a man, another in a woman, still another in a child. Nor does it differ in freeman and slave. It is one and the same quality in them all, just as particular colors and shapes, however individual, are instances of color or shape in general. Eventually, after one or two tentative definitions, it is agreed that knowledge of what is good is the common quality. But how does the soul come by that knowledge? Obviously it is innate; witness the instinctive acquaintance with certain mathematical truths shown by uneducated persons who have never studied a word of geometry.

So far, so good. But the perplexity is by no means overcome. Granting that knowledge of the good is innate, how does it ever become ingrained in the soul? This is the crux of the difficulty. In dealing with it Plato states for the first time his famous doctrine of Recollection, upon which we touched in the chapter on Socrates.<sup>7</sup> There are stories, he says, in the poet Pindar and elsewhere of the soul's being immortal and passing from body to body. "Having then been born again many times, and having seen all things that are . . . she has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue, and about everything. . . . For all inquiry and all learning is but recollection."<sup>8</sup>

To illustrate the possession of these latent memories by high and low alike, Socrates now calls a slave boy of Meno's and by a skilful series of questions, in which no information is imparted, elicits from him a recognition of the truth of the Pythagorean problem. Here then is clear evidence. Although

<sup>7</sup> *Supra*, p. 75 ff.

<sup>8</sup> 81. Adapted from Jowett's translation.

the boy has never been taught this truth, he possesses in latent form a knowledge of it, which has been awakened by Socrates' questions. It looks, then, as if he had come by it before birth in another existence and as if, generally speaking, the truth about all things had always existed in the soul.<sup>9</sup>

But virtue does not depend altogether upon knowledge. Right opinion is also a sufficient basis for right action. And instinctive correctness of moral judgment, like knowledge, is an inheritance from another world. But these two, true opinion and knowledge, are the only right guides to behavior. Virtue then is a divine gift. It is not acquired, for no one can implant it from the outside. On the other hand it cannot be called a natural endowment.<sup>10</sup> By this Plato apparently means that it is possessed, not by all living beings, but only by "souls," who have had a pre-natal, "supernatural" contact with the Good.

The *Meno*, we see, has carried us very far—much further indeed than we are prepared to be carried at the present stage of proceedings. The existence of a moral order, we are as good as told, is just one more proof of the existence of a world of eternal Forms beyond the world of phenomena, and we are ushered into their presence as we were at the end of our discussion of love and knowledge. But we are by no means at the end of our discussion of ethics. We are only just at the beginning. As Plato himself remarks at the close of the *Meno*, before asking how we came by virtue, we should do well to inquire again what it actually is.<sup>11</sup>

This inquiry Plato had been carrying on himself in the *Gorgias*, and we shall do well to turn back and see how he has fared. We may take up the tale where we dropped it in the *Protagoras*. There we had discovered that the good is certainly not the pleasure of the moment, but, perhaps, the greatest possible amount of pleasure in the long run. Now we are to find that a balance of pleasure will not work, and that quality must take the place of quantity as a deciding factor in determining the good.

The dialogue is staged at the house of Callicles, that ambi-

<sup>9</sup> 86 A-B,

<sup>10</sup> 97-100.

<sup>11</sup> 100 B.

tious and unscrupulous politician with whose Nietzschean philosophy of government we have already familiarized ourselves in the chapter on the Sophists. Gorgias and a young disciple, Polus, are for the moment his guests, and Socrates, together with Chaerophon, whom he runs across in the street, are invited in by him to see the great man exhibit his Sophistic tricks. The conversation, general at first, turns on the subject of rhetoric, which after some preliminary sparring is defined as the art of persuading lawcourts and assemblies about the just and the unjust.<sup>12</sup> To this Socrates objects that rhetoric is not really an art and does not presuppose in the teacher, or necessarily instill into the pupil, a true knowledge of justice and injustice. It is rather a kind of flattery appealing to the desire and caprice of the moment, heedless of what is best in the long run. It belongs in the same class as cookery and cosmetics and sophisms, which are poor substitutes for the genuine arts of medicine, gymnastic, and logic, and which give only a specious simulation of wholesomeness, health, and truth. Nay more, the power that one may attain by that sort of persuasion is not real power at all. For the only power worth having is the ability to benefit oneself, and the exercise of that ability requires knowledge and wisdom. In the hands of a fool power is only an instrument of self-stultification or even self-destruction. The mere possession of power, then, is no advantage; witness the portion of tyrants who so often use their power to promote their own wickedness.<sup>13</sup>

But, interposes Polus, we can be both wicked and happy. Who would not be a tyrant, if he had the chance? No, Socrates replies, it is better to suffer than to do injustice, and better, too, that the wrongdoer should be punished than go free. The disgrace, and therefore the evil, of doing is obviously greater than that of suffering, and the lesser of two evils is always to be preferred. Moreover, dishonor, injustice, and evil are diseases, as it were, of the soul, from which she can only recover if she is purged by punishment. Illness of the body, too, has often to be cured by harsh and unpleasant means. But the soul should no more be left untreated and un-

<sup>12</sup> 454 B.<sup>13</sup> 458 C-468 E.



cured than the body. Hence evil-doers, if they really had their own good at heart, would seek out the judge and demand punishment, just as the sick man goes to the doctor and asks for medicine.<sup>14</sup>

These passages are so at variance with the general trend of Greek ethics and so curiously Christian in tone as to have occasioned some comment. Glorification of suffering was not a dominant note in ancient thought, and it would not ordinarily have occurred to the Hellenic mind to do penance and court expiation merely for one's own private satisfaction. It must be remembered, however, that in the case of sacrilege and some major offenses against human beings, the necessity of atonement and purification was insisted on by the established religion. Moreover, poets like Aeschylus and Sophocles had come to feel that the suffering of the evil-doer, apart from the ceremonial or material amends he might make, would in itself serve to expiate his guilt and create within him a clean heart.<sup>15</sup> And the Orphic-Pythagorean movement can scarcely have failed to realize some of the more subjective and spiritual implications of its central doctrine of the fall and redemption of the soul.

Still, the doctrines propounded by Socrates were sufficiently paradoxical and startling and "Christian" to bring Callicles into the scrimmage. Hitherto he had been standing on the side lines, but now he could no longer restrain his amazement and contempt. All this, he cried, is nothing but "slave-morality," an attempt of the majority, which is composed of weaklings, to terrorize the strong and able minority and deprive them of their natural right to rule and do what they please with the inferior masses. With the political developments of this theory we have already dealt and will not repeat our discussion.<sup>16</sup> It is only Callicles' idea of the happy life led by the favored few that concerns us here. In the rightly developed man, he goes on, the passions will not be controlled but encouraged and satisfied, and this is virtue. To be always wanting and always gratifying one's wants is true happiness. Such a life may be, as

<sup>14</sup> 469 A-481 B.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 37 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Fairbanks, *Greek Religion*, p. 343.

Socrates says, like a leaky vessel which loses and wastes its contents as fast as it is replenished. But a sound and full vessel is stagnant. Pleasure depends upon a constant flowing in and out. The larger the holes, the larger the waste and the greater and quicker the replenishment. To be like a cormorant, forever hungering and eating, forever thirsting and drinking, is the ideal.

But, interposes Socrates, how about itching and scratching? Provided Callicles could have enough of them and could pass his whole life scratching, would that be his notion of happiness? In other words, must all desires and all gratifications, from whatever source derived, be regarded as equally conducive to happiness, provided only one can get enough of what one wants? <sup>17</sup> Callicles is offended at the vulgarity of Socrates' examples, and his offense gives the lie to the proposition that the good is the greatest amount of pleasure in the long run, just as Protagoras' recoil in somewhat similar circumstances, we may remember, gave away the case the Sophists had made out for the good being the pleasure of the moment. But Callicles is not let off as easily as was Protagoras. Plato holds him to the original proposition for a few more pages in order to demolish it by logic as well as by instinct, though it must be said the arguments employed do not ring loud or even altogether sound to the modern ear. How can pleasure and pain be equated with good and evil, Socrates asks, seeing that good and evil are opposites and therefore cannot co-exist in the same person at the same time, whereas pleasure and pain are often mingled and interdependent in the same sensation—as for example, that of quenching one's thirst—and appear and disappear together? Again the cowardly may experience as much or even more pleasure than the brave, and therefore, according to Callicles' reasoning, ought often to be accounted as good as or even better. The good, in a word, is something different from pleasure, as this final absurdity forces Callicles to admit. It is that for the sake of which all our actions are done, and with reference to which we distinguish those pleasures and pains that are beneficial from those that are harmful. For pleasure

<sup>17</sup> 481 C-494 E.

like everything else, "is to be sought for the sake of that which is good, and not that which is good for the sake of pleasure."<sup>18</sup>

The rather unconvincing character of these arguments, however, need not detain us. Callicles' recoil from Socrates' vulgarity is sufficient to betray the inadequacy of a mere balance of pleasure as a test for determining the good. But if the greater pleasurable-ness of a life is no guarantee of its virtue, where is such a guarantee to be found? Only, replies Socrates, by meditating upon the higher interests of the soul.<sup>19</sup> And such meditation, he goes on, shows that the claims made at the beginning of the dialogue are true—that rhetoric and the kindred pursuits flatter a love of pleasure rather than a love of the true good, and make no effort to improve and raise human nature;<sup>20</sup> that the tyrant, who has the power to do as he pleases but not the wisdom to see and pursue his best interests, will only end by corrupting himself and those about him; and that it is far better to suffer than to do evil, and better to be punished and corrected for what evil one has done than to escape retribution.<sup>21</sup> The truly wise and virtuous statesman, then, will try not to flatter and please the people but to guide them and make them better—which few statesmen, and even those accounted greatest, have done in the past.<sup>22</sup> Socrates, himself, will doubtless incur the hatred of the populace for his efforts, but he has faith in the justice of the Gods. After death, he has heard, the souls of the departed appear for judgment, and those of good men are despatched to the Islands of the Blest. But the souls of evil-doers must be cleansed of their misdeeds by purgatorial pains, and if they prove incurable, must suffer eternally as examples of the wages of sin. The good man, then, has nothing to fear in this life or the next.<sup>23</sup> So "let us take the argument as our guide, which has revealed to us that the best way of life is to practice justice and virtue in life and death."<sup>24</sup>

But the main question still hangs fire. It is all very well to say that virtue lies in knowledge of what is for the best interests

<sup>18</sup> 494 A-500 A.

<sup>21</sup> 509.

<sup>24</sup> 527 E.

<sup>19</sup> 501-506.

<sup>22</sup> 511-519.

<sup>20</sup> 510-511.

<sup>23</sup> 521-527.



of the soul, but what are those interests? So far all our results have been largely negative. We have learned what the good is not, not what it is. We have abandoned altogether the doctrine, implicit in the Sophist teaching and proclaimed from the house tops by Aristippus, that the good is the pleasure of the moment. Even the relatively moderate theory that it is the most pleasurable life as a whole—which we accepted provisionally at the end of the *Protagoras*—will not do. A whole lifetime of itching and scratching, however intensely and durably gratifying it may be, is somehow felt not to be so good as a less pleasurable but more “honorable” career. But why? Where shall we find a standard that justifies the distinction between honorable and dishonorable, “higher” and “lower,” in cases where the balance of pleasure is equal, or that may even make less pleasure preferable to more? What is this further standard of right and wrong that seems to determine whether a pleasure shall be considered good or bad?

In the course of the argument, both in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*, a name has already been suggested for this standard. We have begun insensibly and almost surreptitiously to talk about *justice* and *injustice* and to use them as measures for gauging the moral quality of pleasure and pain. Perhaps then, by inquiring into the nature of justice we may throw some light on our problem and forward our quest of the good. It is to such an investigation that Plato addresses himself in the *Republic*.

We may remark at once that the Greek word that we translate by “justice” has a very wide and extra-legal meaning. It covers and focuses the whole sphere of external moral action, and is indeed defined by Aristotle in its broadest sense as not “part of virtue but virtue entire,”<sup>25</sup> or at least as “complete virtue as shown in relation to our neighbour.”<sup>26</sup> And Plato, as we shall soon see, is willing to apply it also to the inner life and to a man’s dealings with himself. We might, then, translate it simply as “morality,” or, if the word had not turned distasteful from too much mouthing by a sour and crabbed ethics, as

<sup>25</sup> Eth. Nic., V, 1, 1130a, 9–10.

<sup>26</sup> Eth. Nic., *ibid.*, 1129b, 25 (Oxford trans.).

"righteousness."<sup>27</sup> But whatever term we choose for expressing its meaning, we are, in investigating its nature, asking ourselves what a man and what a society would be like if the Idea of the Good were operating effectively in human nature and conduct.

The scene of the *Republic* is laid at the Peiraeus in the house of Cephalus, a very wise, rich, and mellow old man, who, having outlived the pleasures of the senses and gladly escaped from the tyranny of the passions, has turned to the consolations of meditation and good talk. Among the other participants in the discussion we find, besides Socrates, Plato's two brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, and the Sophist Thrasymachus. The conversation begins in the old key of negation. The preliminary definitions of justice examined and discarded one by one in the first book have already been enumerated in the chapter on Socrates as examples of the dialectical method, and we may refresh our memory of them there.<sup>28</sup> We also may recall there,<sup>29</sup> and in the chapter on the Sophists,<sup>30</sup> the argument with which Thrasymachus makes a loud and violent irruption into the dialogue—that justice is simply the interest of the stronger, or, in other words, of the party who happens to be on top, and is therefore a wholly man-made, arbitrary, relative affair with no foundation or sanction in either nature or authoritative convention. It is to the refutation of this argument that the rest of the first book is devoted.

The first steps of this rebuttal were included in our description of the dialectical method,<sup>31</sup> but we will repeat them in order to follow more easily the further development of the argument. If justice be the interest of the governing class, what, Socrates asks, is the situation when the government mistakes its own interest and issues suicidal orders? Should the just man even then obey its edicts, when by his obedience he is contributing to the injury of his lawful rulers? Thrasymachus parries by remarking that the stronger, so far as they are really stronger, and the government, so far as it is a true government, are never

<sup>27</sup> This translation is suggested by Burnet, *Ethics of Aristotle*, ed. 1900, introduction to Bk. V.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 59.

mistaken as to their best interests, just as neither the arithmetician, the physician, nor any other "person of skill ever makes a mistake in so far as he is what his name implies."<sup>32</sup> So far as the artist errs, he is no artist. Very well, replies Socrates, you admit that government is an art. But what is the function and "interest" of an art and of an artist? The "interest" of medicine is the health and well-being of the patient, of the shepherd, the protection and care of his sheep. And the arts in general have no private or selfish end. Their whole essence, aim, and satisfaction lie in perfecting their subject matter. By analogy then, the true interest of the governing classes should be the welfare and happiness of the governed.<sup>33</sup>

At this point, Thrasymachus, aware that he has been trapped, loses his temper. Socrates, he cries out, is so childish that he should have a nurse to wipe his nose. He cannot even distinguish the shepherd from the sheep. Why does the shepherd tend and fatten his sheep, at any rate? Not for their good certainly, but for the profit that may be made from them. Furthermore, any fool can see that the unjust have a far better time of it than the just. The just man loses always by his honesty, whereas the unjust, particularly if he operates on a grand scale, gets what he wants and is happy. Happiest of all is the tyrant. All men envy him and would emulate him if they dared.<sup>34</sup>

Having, as Socrates remarks, deluged his audience like a bath-man, Thrasymachus would fain be gone. But he is detained by his hearers, who insist that he shall remain to defend his position, and he is at once taken to task by Socrates on the ground that he has confused the interest and intention of an art with the additional payment that the artist receives from society for work well done. So far as a man is a true artist and nothing else, he is wholly wrapped up and contented in what he is doing, but his fellow men contrive further rewards for him by honoring him and giving him money for his services. And in the case of the art of government, if he will not exercise his art and take the reins into his own hands, he is penalized by being ruled by his inferiors. The governors then, even if they assume office to avoid this penalty, are none the less interested, *qua*

<sup>32</sup> *Rep.* I, 340 D-E.<sup>33</sup> I, 341-342.<sup>34</sup> I, 343-344 C.



rulers pure and simple, in the welfare of the governed, just as the painter, *qua* artist, is no less oblivious of himself and wrapped up in his subject because he happens to sell his work afterwards. Indeed, in a city composed entirely of good men, far from any one's wishing to be a tyrant, every one would dodge the task of governing if he could, for it is much more trouble to look after other people than to be well cared for by somebody else, as the governed would be in a properly ordered state.<sup>35</sup>

Again, if government be an art, as Thrasymachus has admitted, it must, like all the other arts, have some sort of limiting, defining canon or principle that gives it form and restrains it from vagary and excess. No musician, for example, desires to go beyond the laws of music, nor do doctors try to compete with one another in circumventing the rules of hygiene. But this is exactly what the unjust man does. He tries to defy and break down every rule and law and get the better not only of the good man but of his fellow miscreants. He out-Herods Herod and is more unjust even than injustice. The just man on the other hand is like the good artist. He desires to excel in his line, to be better than the bad, but he does not strive to exceed the ideal, and get the better of goodness itself. The just man, then, turns out to be the good and wise man because of his conformity to the rules of his art. Lack of a rule, and excess and disorder such as the unjust man betrays, are signs of a poor artist, and, in the art of conduct, of an evil and ignorant man.<sup>36</sup>

Thrasymachus is now perspiring freely, the day being hot, and what is more, is blushing, but Socrates will not let him off. He has said that the unjust are stronger and happier than the just, and he must be made to recant these two points. In the first place, Socrates proceeds to point out, in an unjust state every man's hand is set against his neighbor. But strife and division breed weakness. Only where there is honor among thieves can a gang act together in a strong and formidable way. Moreover, the unjust man is not only at odds with his fellows but is at variance with himself for want of a unifying principle in his own life. Hence he is far more at the mercy of circumstances than the just man, who has a standard of action. From

<sup>35</sup> I, 344 C-347.

<sup>36</sup> 349 B-350 D.

the point of view, then, both of the state and of the individual, injustice is really a source of weakness, justice of strength.<sup>37</sup>

As regards the question whether the unjust are happier than the just, we must ask what happiness is. Everything has an end or use for which it is particularly adapted. The eye, for example, has seeing for its function, the ear, hearing. And ear and eye have a special conformation or excellence, or, as we might say, "virtue," which enables them to fulfil their function and express their nature. Now, we have already admitted that the virtue of the soul is right behavior. And by the exercise of her proper virtue—that is, of justice—she will, like all other things, attain her proper end, which, after all, is to live happily. Injustice, then, is to the soul what a defect in vision would be to the eye. It keeps her from performing her function of living well and attaining happiness. Hence happiness goes hand in hand with justice, not with injustice.<sup>38</sup>

Plato has now logically refuted to his own satisfaction the Sophistic doctrine and that of Thrasymachus. But he is no nearer saying what justice really is, and even his negative victory is not overwhelming. For the doctrine of expediency and the habit of opportunism are too deeply rooted in human nature to be overturned by anything so light as logic, and they still continue to breed maxims, conventions, and practices in defiance of any abstract rebuttal. We might then suspect that, however fallacious their theory might be, the Sophists were very near hitting the nail on the head when it came to the actual practice of humanity. This suspicion Plato expresses at the beginning of the second book through his brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus, who represent certain attitudes about morality which are still fairly common. Thus Glaucon makes himself the spokesman of the popular opinion that justice is not a good in itself but a disagreeable though necessary means to attaining rewards and respectability. Injustice, he feels, would seem to be the natural state of man. All men in secret regard it as more pleasurable and profitable than justice, and would pursue it openly if they could do so with impunity. But they cannot, and, much as they may love to commit violence, they hate equally to

<sup>37</sup> I, 351 A–352 A.

<sup>38</sup> I, 352 B–354.

suffer it. So they compromise and try to find a happy mean between suffering and committing, and this compromise is the real origin and essence of what we call justice. But if only we did not have to fear retaliation and could act with impunity, would it not be far better to be unjust, and rich, and fortunate, and happy, than just, and subjected to every suffering and indignity? <sup>39</sup>

These opinions, which are forerunners of the famous "social contract" theories of Hobbes and Rousseau in modern times, are immediately backed up by Adeimantus. The strongest point of all, he says, has been overlooked. It is not merely a question of pleasure and profit. The very moral quality and essence of justice and injustice—the praiseworthiness of the one and the blameworthiness of the other—would seem to the popular mind to be bound up with their consequences. Children are brought up to be good, not for the sake of being good, but because honesty is the best policy in this world and leads to a heavenly reward in the next. And in like manner they are frightened away from evil, not by being shown its intrinsic ugliness, but by stories of the hell-fire that awaits the wicked. Such teaching is pernicious in the extreme. The supernatural sanctions are easily enough undermined by skepticism, and the rewards and penalties of this world, apportioned as they are according to appearance rather than reality, put a premium upon hypocrisy. If morality is to be established upon a sane basis, it must be shown to be worth while in and for itself, quite apart from the question of earthly or heavenly reward and punishments. Will Socrates be so kind as to undertake the task? <sup>40</sup>

Obviously the time has come for a change of tactics. The untenable positions have now all been reduced, and we know with considerable certainty what justice is not. We must at last tackle directly the question of what it is. But this question plainly cannot be answered by analyzing human nature as it stands. We are too imperfect, too much creatures of ignorance and impulse and expediency, to get results in that way. We shall do far better to paint in fancy a picture of what a truly just man, if he existed, would be like. By considering

<sup>39</sup> II, 357-362 C.

<sup>40</sup> II, 368 C-369 A.



and analyzing such an ideal portrait we may perhaps penetrate and reveal the secret. And this is the method that we find Plato following. In pursuing it, moreover, he suggests a device that might not have immediately occurred to us. All words, Socrates remarks to Glaucon and Adeimantus, are more easily and clearly read if they are writ large. And a short-sighted man who has seen the bigger letters will more quickly recognize them again when he comes upon them in the small. If, then, we wish to make out the nature of justice in the individual, we shall do well to magnify it first to political proportions and read its meaning in the constitution of society. To this end, we shall do well to picture in our minds the organization of a perfect state.<sup>41</sup> In our discussion of ethics, then, we must be prepared for an interlude of political theory.

## II

The first strokes of the Platonic brush upon this new canvas sketch for us an idyllic, primitive society in which the elemental wants of life are frugally provided for by a division among the citizens of the simplest forms of agriculture and handicraft.<sup>42</sup> How far we are intended to take this picture seriously—whether Plato meant it as a historical description of the origin of the state, or as an allegorical analysis of it into its fundamental elements and functions, and again whether he is covertly poking fun at the Cynic craze for the simple life, or really wishes that he, too, might dwell in Arcady—is an open and disputed question.<sup>43</sup> In any case Socrates' audience refuse to consider it, and Glaucon, laughing at its lack of modern conveniences and comforts, asks him if he could not make better provision for even a city of pigs. Socrates retorts that Glaucon requires a picture, not only of a state, but of a luxurious one. But he displays no objection to modifying his portrait,<sup>44</sup> perhaps because Plato, whatever his own penchant for the simple life may have

<sup>41</sup> II, 362 C–367 E.

<sup>42</sup> II, 369 B–372 D.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, p. 69 ff. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 166. Gomperz, *op. cit.*, II, ch. V, 11, 6.

<sup>44</sup> II, 372 E.

been, was forced to admit that the complications of civilization, if properly handled, were in themselves no obstacle to enacting the Good.

The more complicated state, however, will require two more classes of people. Not only will its economic organization be more diversified through new callings—actors, artists, poets, musicians, dancers, dressmakers, servants, tutors, wet-nurses, ladies' maids, barbers, confectioners, chefs, and what not <sup>45</sup>—but its natural growth and desire for new territory, not to speak of the temptation its wealth will offer to neighboring states, will necessitate a standing army, expert in the art of war, to extend and protect it. Some of these soldiers will show a special aptitude for command, and to those who unite with their military virtues of bravery and spirit a certain humanness of outlook and philosophic love of knowledge and wisdom the guidance of the whole state should be entrusted.<sup>46</sup> The ideal state, in a word, will consist of three classes, the great mass of producers of all sorts, the soldiers, and the rulers or guardians.

This division of the state into three classes may have been suggested to Plato by the Pythagorean doctrine that mankind consists of three types, the lovers of wisdom, the lovers of honor, and the lovers of wealth—types to which his classes correspond.<sup>47</sup> But in his hands the original tripartite division becomes to all intents and purposes dualistic, for no very clear distinction is made between the military and the ruling classes. Both are set over against the masses, and are subjected to the same primary and secondary education and to the same peculiar discipline of life. Politically speaking, at least, we have really only two orders, the producing lower classes, the economic viscera of the state as it were, defended and directed from above by a comparatively small, sharply marked out aristocracy of combined brains and brawn.

It is the fortunes of the upper classes that absorb from now on all of Plato's attention, and it will help soften the boldness of many of his conclusions, if we keep it in mind that his

<sup>45</sup> II, 373 B-D.

<sup>46</sup> II, 373 D-376 C.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 163.

arguments are meant to apply, not to the great body of the state, but only to a select group picked out to discharge a special function. This abrupt dismissal of the masses from further consideration may be wounding to the conceit of modern democracy, but Plato's point is clear and logical enough. The welfare of the masses will follow as a matter of course, if only the state be well governed and defended. But the capacity for governing is not wide-spread, and a full realization of this capacity is even more limited. Moreover, unless intelligence and enlightenment are united with a love of the state and a sense of civic responsibility, nothing but harm can result. Good government, then, is bound up with the preservation or emergence of a comparatively limited superior class fitted by nature to rule, who have had their inborn abilities thoroughly developed by a long and arduous drilling in the nature of everything that is best, and who have been imbued with a patriotic desire to realize the ideal in the body politic. Upon the vital necessity of such a class Plato cannot too strongly insist, and their breeding and training constitute for him the fundamental problem of political theory.

Curiously enough, however, his interest is concentrated on their education, and of the method by which they are to be brought into the world and kept in existence we get no single clear and concise account. We have to form our conjectures on this point from scattered and often somewhat contradictory passages. The general plan would seem to be one of selective breeding supplemented by a constant weeding out of the culls and an infusion of new blood from the best elements of the non-pedigreed stock. Provision is made for raising to a higher level the "nature's noblemen" who may happen to appear in the artisan class, and for degrading such scions of the aristocracy as prove unworthy of their high birth. Indeed, this transposition of ranks, which nature sometimes orders, will be one of the prime cares of the government.<sup>48</sup> But Plato has little faith in the power of nature to supply noblemen unaided. It takes as a rule more than one generation to make a gentleman, and his main reliance is on a process of careful breeding within the

<sup>48</sup> III, 415 A-C. Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 175.



ranks of the guardians themselves. Devices for preventing the degeneration of the ruling class—and he was really, and perhaps rightly, far more interested in forbidding the best than in encouraging the worst to become mediocre—occupied, as we shall see, a large part of his thought.

We now turn back to the subject that Plato had so greatly at heart, and upon which he lavished his attention—the proper education of the upper classes. He begins by accepting the established Athenian curriculum of his day and laying down as a primary schooling gymnastics, or the care and development of the body, and “music” in its wide Greek sense of the cultivation of the mind through the study of the great poets, some of whose compositions, to be properly appreciated, had to be sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. This “literary course not only taught taste, but, since the poets were the real religious teachers of Greece, it also taught religion and something of ethics. The whole curriculum (which lasted from the age of six to that of fourteen) would produce a versatile man, who could sing a lyric and accompany himself on the harp, could quote Homer and Hesiod *à propos*, and was physically as well as mentally developed.”<sup>49</sup>

Plato, however, is far from accepting “music” as it is taught, and the criticism into which he immediately launches leads him rather far afield. But the *Republic* is a thing of wheels within wheels, and we need not be surprised at finding the parenthesis of political theory which was inserted into the discussion of ethics now interrupted in its turn by an incidental discussion of the nature and function of the fine arts. The transition, moreover, is as natural, as easy, and as seemingly unavoidable in the one case as it is in the other.

### III

For Plato thoroughly disapproved of the kind of literature that formed the basis of the current “musical” education. In the first place, it shocked his religious sense. The teaching of true religion played, he felt, a vital part in the bringing up of

<sup>49</sup> Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

children. But as matters stood, the young were gathering from Homer and Hesiod and the other poets all sorts of unworthy ideas of the Gods—that they were a dishonest, licentious, violent, uproarious lot who dispensed good and evil alike to mankind with careless hand. In this life the wicked were depicted as often happy, and the good as miserable, evil as profitable, and righteousness as a losing game. And the gloomy and desolate pictures of the next world were calculated to terrify the stoutest and most virtuous heart. Death was always an occasion for frenzied and indiscriminate lamentation, and the souls of the departed were portrayed as mere witless, gibbering shades flitting about the gloomy house of Hades in the darkness beneath the earth.

Ideas like these had no business in a pure and reformed religion such as an ideal state should teach its young. It was no use pleading that they were mere allegories, for children were incapable of distinguishing the allegorical from the literal, and what they learned in youth was indelibly and unalterably impressed upon the mind. A clean sweep must be made of all these stories, canonical though they might be. The divine nature, in which there is no deceit, no trickery, no evil, neither any alteration or shadow of turning, must be represented as absolutely good and the author of good only, and death must be divested of its terrors by implanting a lively faith that the good man has nothing to fear from it. Nor should the poets be allowed to portray the just as miserable, even in this life, or the unjust as happy. To this end, it should be one of the first duties of the government of an ideal state to exercise a strict censorship of literature and of religious doctrine, and to see to it that the young hear and believe nothing that is not morally edifying and a model of virtuous thought.<sup>50</sup>

In the passages just reviewed Plato, it will be noted, is killing two birds with one stone. Not only is he apparently warping the vision and binding the hands of the artist in the interest of a puritanical morality, but he is also, like Xenophanes of old, advocating sweeping and drastic reforms in the content of religious belief. Xenophanes had merely uttered a philosophic

<sup>50</sup> II, 377 A-III, 392 C.

protest against current ideas and indicated what seemed to him a higher view of the divine nature. Plato, however, would have the state establish and enforce his protestantism and forcibly suppress any disagreement with it. In this proposition to have the rulers dictate what shall and shall not be believed and written of the Gods, we get a distinct foretaste of the theocratic flavor that makes itself so evident in later dialogues like the *Statesman* and the *Laws*.

To return, however, for the moment to the arts. It is not merely the subject matter of literature that displeases Plato. He criticizes the form as well. The dramatic form, wherever it appears, is bad, for it is indiscriminately imitative. The poet who introduces it into narration must frequently make himself the direct spokesman of evil, and is condemned, as it were, out of the mouths of his characters. And the playwright, in casting his actors for ridiculous and vulgar and even villainous parts, identifies both them and himself with their unworthy rôles. But in an ideal state, so far as imitation is allowed at all, it must be only of the good. Writer and player alike will be ashamed of portraying anything base. The run of dramatists, then, however subtle and pleasing their art, will have to be banished to some other city. Moreover, all epic poetry must be reduced to a simple narrative form, in which the poet speaks almost always in his own person, and certainly never in that of a low or evil character.<sup>51</sup>

Now a large part of Greek literature, as we have seen, was written to be recited or sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument, and to the nature of this accompaniment Plato turns. The same state control and subordination of everything to strictly "moral" considerations must be applied here too. The plaintive Lydian harmonies, which imitate and arouse sorrow, and the soft Ionian melodies, which are a favorite accompaniment for drinking songs and the like, and tend to relax the soul, must be suppressed. Only strains in the sterner Dorian and Phrygian modes, which are suitable to cheer and steel the heart in the hour of adversity and to hold it to temperance and high thoughts in the interludes of peace and freedom of

<sup>51</sup> III, 392 D-398 C.



action, should be permitted. Newfangled, many stringed, curiously harmonized instruments and strange, complicated scales, and particularly the flute, which with its subtlety and flexibility is the root of all evil, must go, too. Only the old-fashioned lyre, with no modern improvements, the harp, and for the countryside the shepherd's pipe, are fit to make music in the perfect commonwealth. Rhythm also must be as carefully scrutinized and expurgated of anything that might arouse an unworthy mood.<sup>52</sup>

All the other arts, weaving, embroidery, painting, sculpture, architecture, and the like are to be censored by the state along the same lines. They must be guided by the principle of simplicity, and restricted to expressing the image of the good in their works. Only thus can the future rulers of the state grow up "in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty and the influence of fair words shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a pure region, and insensibly draw the soul from the earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason."<sup>53</sup>

But Plato's quarrel with the arts goes far deeper than their lack of prudery. It is not merely that the artist finds beauty and dramatic power and interest in things of which the puritan disapproves. Even his depiction of the most innocent scenes and events has the taint of corruption. For his subject matter is the sensible world and his works are copies of particular objects. But what, in their turn, are the things with which he is concerned, except imitations and shadows of the real world of Forms and Ideas? Works of art, then, are merely copies of copies, thrice removed from truth and perfection. This is a point brought out at length in the tenth book of the *Republic* where Plato returns to the subject of the arts. Take, he says, a bed, for example. It is issued, so to speak, in triplicate. First there is the real thing, the Form or essence of beds in general,

<sup>52</sup> III, 398 D-400 E. Similar criticisms are made to-day of the development of modern music, *e.g.*, of the immoral harmonies of Wagner and Strauss, and the demoralizing influence of the saxophone and of jazz.

<sup>53</sup> III, 401 A-401 D.

made, as it were, by a divine carpenter and laid up in heaven. Then there is the material, particular bed made by a human carpenter, which is an incomplete and perishable copy of the divine original. And finally there is the painter's picture of the bed, which is a reproduction of the carpenter's imitation. Painting, then, is an imitation, not of things as they are but of things as they appear—of appearance, not of reality. Its versatility and variety, its power of illusion, its ability to do everything, come just from the fact that it lightly touches on a small part of things, and that part an image. Poets, painters, and their ilk, for all their conceit and reputation for wisdom and insight, are of all people the farthest removed from real existence and therefore the least conversant with it. At far greater advantage are practical, active men of affairs who, through making and using the objects that the artist only depicts, really learn something of their true functions and natures. The fact is that the imitative art is an inferior who marries an inferior and has inferior offspring. Not only painting, but poetry with its brood of emotionalism, false sentimentality, self-pity, unseemliness, and buffoonery, witnesses to this. If Homer had really been able to educate and improve mankind, he would never have been allowed to wander abroad singing his songs. He would have been carefully kept at home honored and beloved, or at least he would have been followed by a host of disciples everywhere he went. As it is, much as we may admire him and his art, he cannot be allowed to enter the ideal state, where hymns to the Gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry that ought to be admitted.<sup>54</sup>

This seeming emasculation of the arts is astonishing, all the more so as Plato himself was so great an artist. To saddle art, as he would appear to do, with a priggish, self-consciousness of service to the community, and to restrict its creative impulse to the production of moral tales for children, nursery pictures, and hymn tunes, is something that even those self-appointed guardians of public and private morals, our modern watch and ward societies, have not as yet attempted. And his theory of

<sup>54</sup> X, 595 A–607 A. Passages from Jowett's translation have been introduced without quotation.

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art as an imitation of sensible objects, and therefore in the third remove from truth, challenges immediate criticism on the ground that he would appear to misunderstand most unaccountably the true inwardness of the artist's vision and the real significance of his work.

It is, I think, impossible to clear Plato entirely of these charges. Very likely we are dealing with a naked outcropping of that vein of puritanism which, as we have seen, comes now and then to the surface in his philosophy. Still, a closer scrutiny and a willingness to read between the lines may at least reveal extenuating circumstances and keep our final sentence from being altogether unsympathetic. So far as the attack on poetry is concerned, we must remember in the first place the part Greek poetry played in Greek religion. The poets drew as freely upon the divine life as upon human for their subject matter, and it was to them that people turned for instruction regarding the nature of the Gods and their ways both with one another and with man. Homer and Hesiod were the only written repository of Greek religious tradition, and indeed, had an almost scriptural authority. But the picture they gave preserved many primitive and monstrous stories, and even at its best could not but disappoint and distress any thoughtful and religious mind of Plato's day. Plato, then, could scarcely plead for a purer religion and a worthier idea of the divine nature without demanding a very considerable expurgation and bowdlerizing of poetry as it stood. We, to-day, are confronted with somewhat the same difficulty with respect to the Bible, many passages of which do little credit to the divinity or the moral standards of their supposed author. Where, however, Plato was for an immediate and drastic censorship, we, with our "higher criticism," our realization that the idea of God like all things human has evolved from humble beginnings, and, last but not least, our less quick, less intelligent and less impressionable public, are inclined, more sensibly perhaps, to put up with what is bad in our sacred books for the sake of the good.

Again, turning from the poet's representation of the divine to his portrayal of human life, we may discover reasons, if not justifications, for Plato's attitude. His complaint on this



score is apparently lodged mainly against certain contemporary writers, the loss of whose works, and even of whose names, leaves us without grounds for forming an independent opinion of their merits. Doubtless part of his criticism belongs to the perennial resentment aroused at all times in a certain type of character by any and every effort of art to develop new forms and embrace new subjects. And the same is probably true of his attack on music. We to-day are familiar enough with the wholesale and indiscriminate damning of all impressionism, post-impressionism, *vers libre*, skyscrapers, problem-plays, bedroom farces, Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian music, syncopated time, jazz rhythm, and the like, on the part of this or that "purist." Still, after making due allowance for Plato's temperamental pessimism and for the somewhat jaundiced eye through which we are consequently obliged to see such facts as he gives us, we may suspect a very real decline in taste at Athens and conclude, not only that the artistic and literary work of which he complains was second-rate, but that its innovations and "advances," like so many of the experiments with which we are being deluged at the present time, were infected with eccentricity and sensationalism.<sup>55</sup>

To our way of thinking, however, mere deterioration of taste scarcely warrants the severity of Plato's criticisms and the solemnity of his tone. Lapses from beauty bother us but little, even when we notice them, and generally those among us who worry the most over any lowering of moral standards are the least concerned at the absence of any aesthetic ones. Our righteous anger is poured out upon books and plays and pictures that are "immoral," not upon those that are inartistic. But Plato makes no accusation of suggestiveness in the narrow sense in which we take the word. The artists whom he denounces were probably of no artistic merit to be sure—purveyors of broad farce, melodrama, and sentimental slush—but to our eyes that sort of thing is innocent enough. Hence we cannot as yet quite understand what all the fuss is about.

Two considerations, however, will help make the situation clearer. In the first place, we must remember that the Hellenic

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Nettleship, *op. cit.*, pp. 105 ff.

mind allowed no division between moral and aesthetic standards. To it the beautiful and the good were one and inseparable, and their union, in which there was no "better half," was consecrated by a single, indissoluble phrase ever recurrent on the Greek tongue. The art of living well—or, in other words, morally—was the finest of all the fine arts. The good man was the man who played such a straight, accurate, pretty game of daily give and take with his fellows, that the exclamation "beautiful" was on the lips of all beholders. Sin, on the other hand, was primarily an eccentricity in thought and deed, a kind of "cubism" in conduct. The Greek word for it meant originally a flying wide and "missing of the mark." It arose from a failure to observe correctly the limits set to action by the situation and nature of mankind, and it implied a certain deficiency and clumsiness in the technique of good behavior, which resulted in a striking of the wrong note in the harmony of the social composition. In a word, all jarring like all pleasing of the moral sense rang with aesthetic overtones.

A thinker like Plato, not only feeling and observing but pondering this fusion of the aesthetic and the moral in the Greek temperament, might, then, well take alarm at a decadence of taste. He would not see in it, as we are only too ready to do, merely an ebbing of something outside the main currents of life, the diminution of which did not vitally or even noticeably lower the general level of civilization. He would rather consider it a dangerous sapping of the whole tone and stamina of Greek culture. In his eyes a people that was losing its aesthetic discrimination and sinking to the creation and enjoyment of second-rate stuff in the other arts must be already dangerously inclined to tolerate inferior standards and performances in the art of conduct. The blinding of the eye to beauty could not but infect and dim the fellow vision of moral goodness. Later, in the *Laws*, it was precisely to such a decline in taste that he attributed the political decline of the Athenian democracy.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps Plato's feelings in the matter were all the stronger, and this brings us to our second point, because of the greater

<sup>56</sup> *Laws*, II, 658 E ff. Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

susceptibility of his race to suggestion. To us with our coarser grain the emphasis he places upon the chameleon-like character of the growing mind and upon the importance of the artistic environment seems exaggerated. Vulgarity and ugliness, even when the meaning of the terms is understood, are not regarded as essentially prejudicial to good conduct. Nor do we find any great harm in the depiction of the grosser offenses against morality like murder, cruelty, robbery, scandal-mongering, and blackmail. And yet it is an open question whether the lack of taste and indifference to beauty of our proletariat have not been a very real hindrance to our attainment, as a people, of an enlightened moral outlook, and whether the constant deluging of the public with accounts of crime may not in itself be a great incentive to our more than average criminality. But if we would estimate the effect of art and literature upon the Hellenic character, we must multiply many times over their influence upon ours. The superior sensitiveness and the quicker intelligence of the Greeks had, like all virtues, a characteristic fault. In their case the outstanding weakness lay in a certain instability and lack of self-control and a tendency towards insincerity and mimicry.<sup>57</sup> Natural-born actors and artists, they loved to pose and be theatrical, and were instinctively inclined to make every part they saw played their own. They were, then, prone to a degree that we cannot easily understand to take on the colors and imitate the actions presented them by poet and playwright. As it is, we talk of the power of the press to mould and influence public opinion. This power, highly magnified and directed upon a much smaller, less unwieldy, and more inflammable mass, was in the hands of Greek literature.

It was a prime function of education, Plato felt, to correct the national vice of insincerity and indiscriminate mimicry and to inculcate straightforwardness and stability of character. Hence, with the arts playing so important a part in education and occupying the position they did in the life of the people, it was imperative, as he saw it, to put them under state control and subject them to censorship. Only thus could he be certain that they would present models the imitation of which would fix

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Nettleship, *op. cit.*, p. 106, Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 193.



the character in the mould he deemed necessary and make a man a trustworthy citizen of the ideal commonwealth.

Nor, after all, need this censorship wreak the havoc in art that we at first supposed. For there is a reverse side to the shield, and Plato, we may be sure, would have deemed it of the utmost importance to shelter the inhabitants of his Republic no less from inartistic treatment of the good than from artistic representations of the bad. Edifying subject matter would not have justified or excused in his eyes vulgarity and tastelessness in the form in which it was set forth. God must be pictured as good, but he must also be depicted and worshipped with splendor and with beauty. A moral purpose must inspire the vision of poet and painter, but their art must be none the less consummate. Were Plato to visit us to-day, he would deal as severely with the churches we are willing to build, the religious services we are content to hold, the hymns we enjoy singing, the sermons we praise, as with the tone of our newspapers and the subjects of our novels and plays. Moody and Sankey would be sent packing along with Homer and Hesiod. Many of our clergy, chiefly the most zealous and evangelical, would be politely invited to leave. For every theatre closed, some edifice built in all ugliness to the great glory of God would be razed to the ground. Prayer-meetings would be as rigorously suppressed as phallic orgies. And sex-novels, exhortations to Christian manhood, the tabloid press, and disquisitions on virtue would all burn on the same pile. In a word, if the Cavalier must adopt the moral standards of the Puritan, the Puritan must adopt the dress, the speech, the grace, the urbanity, the distinction of the Cavalier. Whatever, then, beauty might have lost in the Platonic commonwealth from too narrow a moral supervision, it would largely have regained from a no less strict aesthetic censorship of the expression of moral and religious sentiment.

We pass now to the philosophic core of Plato's criticism. Art copies sensible objects, and its representations are therefore thrice removed from truth and reality. These may well seem extraordinary words in the mouth of a great artist, but let us pause here, also, before we criticize too severely. It may be that Plato is not so much setting forth a positive theory of

art in general as still attacking the tendencies of his day, or at least that he is allowing his concern at the contemporary situation to obscure and embitter his judgment of the subject as a whole. Moreover, he is voicing a half truth about all artistic creation which may have been the whole truth about the particular art he is condemning. For the artist really is an imitator, if only we take the term broadly and deeply enough, and in part he must reproduce or imitate material objects. Not only must he work with a sensible medium of one sort or another—words, musical sounds, colors, shapes—but the occasion, if not the cause, of his creative activity is some suggestive and intriguing twist, actual or possible, in the flux of appearances, which strikes him as good “copy.” And his mirroring or working up of his subject must be a fairly faithful image of appearance, else his creation will be far-fetched and inartistic. To accomplish this he must possess the eye or the ear, the taste, the technical knowledge, and the sleight of hand necessary to manipulate his material with fidelity and beauty, and he must have poise enough to keep the sureness and grace of his technique from running away with him into vagary and affectation. So far, then, there would seem to be something to what Plato says. After all, art is bound hand and foot to appearance and does reflect the sensible world.

Frequently, too, as was perhaps the case with those whom Plato is particularly criticizing, art accepts this bondage and glories in it. It may feel that its ideal lies in perfection of technique. To be a master of words, of paints, of the chisel, is enough for the artist. His problem is essentially a problem of form, of color, of design, and his genius is proved by his ability to solve it. To him, as to the thinker, all things are food, provided only they give him an opportunity to exercise and display his skill. A fishmonger's counter, a half-carved roast of beef with its garnishings, may furnish him with all the elements of as great an artistic triumph, strictly speaking, as a Madonna and Child or a Christ on the Cross. For whatever subject he chooses as a starting point or selects as an afterthought, his work is essentially a study in composition. He uses his model not as an aid to the expression of an idea, but his idea as an aid

to the dexterous manipulation of a model. His real interest is focussed on how rather than on what he shall paint. Our museums and libraries are full of beauty that moves on this level—of the music of words, of transcripts of life, of genre painting and sculpture, and even of *soi-disant* religious art. But art of this sort, however perfect, might seem doubly to conform to the Platonic definition. Not only does it spring from an attachment to the sensible world, but it asks only to complete a vicious circle and return to its starting point. It may rearrange and pose its material as it chooses, but the result is a copy that, in Plato's eyes, transcribes only the sensible features of the original and is no less part and parcel of the flux than they. Of the pure and eternal beauty that transcends sense it has no word and gives no inkling. There is nothing in it to raise the individual, as love and knowledge and right conduct raise him, out of the flux to contemplation of true being.

Still, even if the intention of art is merely to mirror the sensible world, as Plato seems to think, and even if the artist feels himself fulfilled in the technical perfection of his work, there is one point that Plato apparently overlooks. Regarded simply as an imitation of appearances, art is more than bald reflection, more than photography. It is inexact and selective. It touches up its subject and gives it back to us suffused with the humor, the grace, the dramatic appeal, the comic or the tragic note, detected by the artist's eye. The sensible object returns, but with a difference. It is now charged with the beauty of the artist's technique, and that beauty, however superficial, confers upon it a value that it did not possess, or that we did not so clearly see in it, until it was reflected through his mind. The clever handling, then, of a trite, or vulgar, or objectionable subject, by eliciting from it aesthetic values or even the power to amuse, redeems it in part from triviality and sordidness, and makes the copy really better than the original. The most convinced realist, if he be also a true artist, cannot help improving upon life, for his material will in every case be touched by the divine grace of his talent, and there will be at least always something to admire in his imitation even when there is nothing to admire in what he imitates. The artistry shown in his treat-



ment may, of course, be more than offset by objections based upon other than strictly aesthetic grounds, but the fact remains that his imitation will incorporate elements of the good that the sensible object fails to embody. In a word, we might argue against Plato that the artist's representation of the flux, however realistic, was less, not more, removed than the sensible world from the Ideas. Art of any sort we might say, so long as it was not sheer photography or eccentricity, was an approach towards the light, not a further regress into the shadows. No matter what it copied, its imitation, provided only it were beautiful and telling, would be a step away from appearance in the direction of the Platonic Reality.

This brings us to another, more important point, which Plato seems also to ignore, or at any rate to slur. The intention of the artist, at least of the great artist, is not satisfied by a mere imitation of the sensible world, however beautiful and technically perfect his copy may be. For him things have voices, are charged with meanings more beseeching even than their outward beauty. In reflecting the surface of phenomena he seeks at the same time to penetrate it, and to catch and interpret what lies hidden beneath. He feels by the instinct of his art that it is given to him to see more in things than is superficially apparent, and he is driven by his genius to struggle with his medium until he has expressed, so far as is in him and it, the "true inwardness" of his subject. Thus the great landscape painter, whether he use words or color, not only gives us the body of the natural scene in its native loveliness, but at the same time makes us feel all that muted, far-away music of overtone and allusion which we call its "spirit." So, too, great portrait painting impresses us not only with the appearance but with the character of the sitter. And the noblest religious art, in creating the outer semblance of a God or in depicting an episode in his story, also reveals to us something of what he has meant to human life. It is in this power to reach through the sense of beauty the whole life of the beholder and to touch and thrill it with this surcharge of meaning that the signal virtues of the artist—his sincerity, his insight, his tenderness, his profundity—consist. The possession of such power more than atones for

lack of technical facility, and no amount of craftsmanship can make up for its absence.

But now what is this true inwardness, this character, this spirit, that the artist is trying to seize and express? What is this meaning with which to his eye all things are pregnant and of which his hand is seeking to deliver them? What is this revelation that they are forever whispering in his ear, and that he is striving to make audible to all the world? Surely, it is what Plato meant by the Idea. It is that in a thing which experience instinctively turns towards and seeks, and to which it responds—the essence of the thing, its quality of eternity, somehow made manifest in the flesh, and fixed for all time by the poet or painter upon his canvas or his page, something deathless and universal in its appeal, nowhere out of fashion and never outgrown, unchanging in its power to enchant and to transport the soul. We might then take up the cudgels against Plato once again, maintaining not only that the touch of a perfect technique may bring the superficial copy of any item in the flux nearer than its original to the Idea, but also that the intention of all great art is to imitate, not the passing appearance, but the abiding reality behind it. Art, like love and science and simple goodness, is a vision and a grasp of the eternal in the temporal. Its work is not a copy of the sensible object but an elucidation and statement of the Idea embodied within it, so far as the Idea can be set forth in sensible terms. Not merely accidentally by its skill, but essentially by its aim, it raises out of the flux the appearances with which it deals, immortalizes them, and assimilates them to true being.

There remains as a final point to consider the first point upon which we touched—Plato's seeming desire to turn all artists into "uplifters" and to imbue them with a priggish sense of service to the community. Nothing of course could be more devastating to the love, the pursuit, and the creation of beauty. Art can flourish only in an atmosphere of freedom—freedom from the restrictions of convention, social responsibility, and petty moral censorship, freedom to go its own way, live its own life, dream its dreams, and make its experiments and innovations unhampered by the forces of standardization. Whether or not,

then, art for art's sake is a sound theory philosophically, it is the only theory on which a community can act if it is to produce and encourage civilization. Society must tolerate cheerfully the vices and eccentricities of the artistic temperament if it would foster its virtues and its creative genius. It must be willing to breed and bear with the small fry if it is to bring a great man to birth, and it must refrain from nagging the artist about good citizenship and his duty to improve his fellow men, unless it would strangle those virtues, that genius, and that greatness in the cradle, and deprive itself of the splendor these qualities might otherwise have shed upon it. In a word, the attitude of society must be one of leaving the artist at liberty so far as possible and benefiting indirectly by the best of what results.

Still, there is a sense in which Plato's attempt to turn art into conscious service of the community is justified. Paradoxically enough, although art for art's sake may be the theory on which society must proceed, it is not the theory on which art, or at least great art, acts. As a matter of fact and record, the supreme artist would seem always to have loved something besides his art—a friend, a woman, a city, an institution, a vision of life, a God—and consciously to have dedicated his work to the greater glory of this other thing. It is the lesser man who boasts that his art is his only mistress. Moreover, unless the artist would prove as narrow and as bigoted as the petty moralist he detests, he must confess that not only in practice but also in theory art is the service of something wider, more complete, and more final than itself. He may properly insist that conduct is not the whole, or even nine-tenths, of life, but he must as properly admit that the pursuit of beauty is likewise but a fraction of the sum total of good living. He is within his rights and contributes enormously to civilization when he shocks and defies the puritan, and his overstepping of the line drawn by the censor is frequently a timely rebuke to the claims of "morality" to be the sole arbiter of what is good and the sole dictator of how life should be lived. But, at the same time, he must work within limits prescribed in part by moral considerations. He cannot rebuke the whole of life and the total good for being



greater than his art, nor may he, any more than the puritan, shock and defy an ideal in which all human interests unfold themselves and come to flower. Man is not made in water-tight compartments, and too big a stone thrown into one corner of his nature may stir up waves that set his entire being aquiver with repulsion and protest. If the artist pushes his revolt against dictation from the puritan to the point of flouting the magnanimity, the wisdom, and the mellowness of this wider good and this larger morality, he makes his art as provincial, as one-sided, and as offensive, as the righteousness of his strait-laced detractor. Between those two unlovely berries moulded on one stem of irrationality and conceit—a thin-lipped puritanism and thick-lipped aestheticism—there is little to choose. In a word, a philosophy of art for art's sake is no more and no less tenable theoretically than a philosophy of virtue for virtue's sake. The one as little as the other can set itself up as an end to which all other activities must be subordinated. Art is a service, just as virtue is a service, and as every rationalized instinct and interest is a service, of the whole man, whose good, far from being centred upon any one of his functions or faculties, is focussed in an organization of them all.

When all is said and done, our final judgment upon Plato's dealing with the arts must depend upon what we consider his idea of the good to have been, and must share the uncertainty and suspense to which we shall find ourselves doomed on this point. If we must convict him of puritanism and of desiring to make of art a mere means of moral edification, then our attitude will be one of surprise and disappointment. If, on the other hand, we may attribute to him a more liberal idea of the good, much of our criticism will lose its sting. There will still be some point to it, to be sure, in that we may feel that Plato's disgust with the particular conditions of his day made him over-censorious and cast a blight upon his philosophy of art in general. But at the same time we shall be able to concede that his insistence upon art as service and his subordination of it to a greater good are fundamentally sound, in spite of the narrow and violent way they are stated. And here, in

suspense, we must leave the question, and return to our main theme, the education of the guardian class in the ideal state.

## IV

Having disposed of music, or the elementary education of the mind, in the benefits of which, it may be remarked in passing, the lower class also would seem to share,<sup>58</sup> Plato turns his attention to gymnastic or the care and development of the body.<sup>59</sup> This will include not only exercise, but diet and hygiene generally, and the gist of his argument is that from childhood the future guardians should be kept in strict training. There must be no drunkenness and no women, and the diet must be calculated to produce, not the over-heavy body, slow habit, and easily upset constitution of the usual athlete, but a lean, wiry type inured to hardship and to changes of water and food and of heat and cold. To this end a simple, military, gymnastic, camp life on plain fare will be best. Physicians should be unnecessary. Every man should be able to doctor himself with simple remedies. If he has a disease that he cannot himself cure, or from which he will not naturally recover within a reasonable time, it is better for him and for the state that he should die quickly and easily, rather than be kept alive, a hopeless invalid, by all sorts of complicated and artificial means. This, of course, is a counsel of perfection. There will have to be doctors—men who have had a medical education, therefore know one disease from another, and are competent to deal with the body. In the same way, in spite of the fact that in an ideal state there should be no need for lawyers or litigation, there must be some judges to distinguish and weigh the relative gravity of the moral ills from which the soul suffers. But doctor and judge alike will minister only “to better natures, giving health both of body and soul, and those who are diseased in their bodies will be left to die, and the corrupt and incurable soul they will put an end to themselves.”<sup>60</sup>

The combination of music and gymnastic thus administered,

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 211, note.

<sup>60</sup> III, 409 E-410 A.

<sup>59</sup> III, 403 C *et seq.*

will, Plato feels, produce the well-balanced and harmonious character indispensable in one who would rule the state. Without gymnastic to tone it down, music breeds softness and effeminacy, wastes away the spirit, and wears out the sinews of the soul. Without music to temper it, gymnastic makes a man hard and savage, all violence and fierceness like a wild beast, living in ignorance and evil conditions, with no sense of propriety and grace. The one, if left to itself, would turn out cowards, the other boors. Taken together, they develop both courage and temperance.

The youths educated under this system must be constantly watched and tested, with an eye to picking those worthy of eventually becoming rulers. While still young, they will form the soldiery or auxiliaries. But as time goes on, some among them will be especially distinguished for a love of country and a devotion to the public interest proof against both fear and the promise of pleasure. "And he who at every age, as boy and youth, and in mature life has come out of the trial victorious and pure, shall be appointed a ruler and a guardian of the state. . . . But he who fails, we must reject."<sup>61</sup> To put it in the form of a parable, all the citizens must regard themselves as children born full grown from the womb of mother earth, and as brothers formed of different metals, gold, silver, and iron, and apt, according to the temper of their particular alloy, for different things. The men of gold are naturally fitted to rule. In the hands of the brass and iron that make good farmers and craftsmen the state would be destroyed. Everybody is to be strictly judged by his metal and placed accordingly, even if it necessitate the degradation of the inferior son of a golden parent, or the raising of some peasant's child, born by chance with princely qualities, to an auxiliary's or a guardian's rank. Such a frank recognition of superiority or inferiority and of the part each man is fitted to play would, if it could only be inculcated, do much to assure social harmony and the welfare of the state.<sup>62</sup>

But when Plato speaks of the guardians and the soldiery as men of gold and silver, he is indeed speaking metaphorically.

<sup>61</sup> III, 413 E-414 A.

<sup>62</sup> III, 414 C-415 D.



For the next point that he makes respecting their regimen is that they must be held to a life of poverty. There is always the danger that a ruling class, and a military class at that, may be tempted to establish a dictatorship and prey upon the masses, and this must be guarded against not only by education but by abolishing private property and the opportunities for self-aggrandizement it offers. The guardians must have no belongings of their own beyond what is absolutely necessary. They will have no private establishments, but will mess and live together like soldiers in a camp. And they will have no money except a small salary sufficient to meet their yearly expenses. Their gold and silver will be the divine metal of character. Material gold and silver in any capacity they will never touch.<sup>63</sup>

It is beside the point to argue that the ruling class will be poor and therefore miserable. In the first place happiness is not dependent upon money, and even if it were, we must remember that we are planning the happiness of the state as a whole, and that to that end we must perhaps sacrifice a disproportionate happiness in any one class. In any case no class should be made happy at the expense of a proper performance of its function in the body politic. If farmers were crowned with gold and dressed up like kings, and if potters passed their time carousing, with only an occasional twirl of their wheel, how long and how well could they stick to their specific jobs? And how much graver the question when the proper direction of the commonwealth is at stake! Some wealth, to be sure, must be allowed the masses, but not enough to unsettle them through money and indolence. On the other hand too great poverty, also, breeds discontent. It prevents a man from outfitting himself efficiently for his work, and from giving his sons and apprentices a good education in their trade. Hence it, too, is to be avoided.<sup>64</sup>

Again, the state must be kept within limits with respect to size as well as wealth. Its population and territory must not be allowed to outgrow and threaten its cohesion and unity. Plato does not here fix any definite limit—but it is interesting

<sup>63</sup> III, 416 D-417.

<sup>64</sup> IV, 419 A-421 A.

to note that in the dialogue of his old age, the *Laws*, where he is giving his final and disillusioned opinion with regard to political constitution, he sets the most practical number at five thousand and forty.

It will be the mission of the governing class to limit both the size and the wealth of the state, with an eye to its best interest. They will, moreover, attend to levelling up and down the oncoming generation, degrading their own offspring if necessary, and elevating those children of the lower classes who are born naturally superior. Again, they will see to it that the system of education is never changed, for education lies at the basis of the state, and any innovation, however harmless it may seem, may well end by undermining the entire structure of the commonwealth. If only such innovation can be prevented, the habits of law and order inculcated by it will render further and more detailed legislation unnecessary. The citizens can be trusted to settle for themselves all matters of conduct and manners, and even of control of business, taxation, public safety, and the like. (Indeed, so important a matter as the ordering of religion may be relegated in an ideal commonwealth to the seat of religious authority—the oracle at Delphi. But where innovation creeps in, and the habits inculcated by a sound and fixed education are upset, all these matters which ought to take care of themselves come to the fore and provide mischief for the restless hands and tongues of the demagogue and the reformer. These gentlemen, to be sure, profess a great respect for the constitution and propose death for any one who advocates changing it, but at the same time no one is readier than they to tamper with it indirectly and to circumvent its spirit through meddlesome legislation designed to effect their pet reforms. They believe that everybody and everything can be turned into just what they want them to be by the mere passing of a law, and they maintain themselves in public favor and get a reputation for statesmanship by treating the people like a garrulous and self-indulgent invalid and by prescribing an endless enactment of one quack remedy after another.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> IV, 421 A–427 C.

The just state is now sufficiently advanced in construction for us to see in what its justice consists, and, having had his fling at the law-makers of his time—who look strangely familiar to us—Plato turns back from politics to morals and defines righteousness. But he is by this time so launched upon political discussion that he reverts to it almost immediately, to expatiate, in the fifth, sixth, and seventh books of the *Republic*, upon the rule of life and education of the governing classes. We shall, then, perhaps do well to see him through in his exposition of political theory before inquiring into the light it sheds on ethics. So far as the regimen of the guardians is concerned, we have, Plato tells us, to prepare for three most revolutionary ideas, or “waves,” as he calls them. The first is the absolute equality of men and women in all things so far as the differences of character and strength imposed upon them by the distinction of sex permit. These differences are really very slight, witness the lower animals where nature has fair play. Women, to be sure, are as a rule somewhat inferior to men in strength and intelligence, but there is no such thing as “woman’s sphere.” There is no natural reason why a woman should not receive practically the same education in music, gymnastic, and even soldiering, as a man. Nothing can be urged against it except prejudice and convention.<sup>66</sup>

Such out-and-out advocacy of woman’s rights and the equality of the sexes was, as we have seen, dead against conservative Athenian opinion and practice, which kept women in Oriental seclusion and allowed them no part in society or politics. Still, there were influences at work that might serve to break the full force of the innovation. The Athenian custom was not universally Hellenic, and, not so many miles away, at Sparta women shared to a large extent the life of the men and even exercised naked with them in the gymnasium. Again, in Athens itself there were advanced women who chafed at their restrictions. In Pericles’ time the salon of Aspasia had been a rallying point not only for the liberals in philosophy and religion but for the more emancipated wives, and part of the disfavor in which she was held was due to the disturbing

<sup>66</sup> V, 451 C-457 B.



"feminism" her example and her hospitality excited in old-fashioned households. Indeed, the feminist movement had reached such proportions that it had provided "copy" for the poets. Two minor writers, Alexis and Amphis, had lampooned it, Aristophanes had paid it his compliments in the *Lysistrata* and the *Ecclesiazusae*, and Euripides had taken up the cudgels for women in the *Medea*. Socrates, too, had insisted on the essential similarity of the two sexes, and had dismissed feminine inferiority as a thing not of kind but of degree. The first wave, then, raised by Plato by no means rolled in from a serene and unruffled sea. There had been plenty of rumbling and agitation, and the atmosphere was already tense and threatening with the demand for equality.<sup>67</sup>

The second wave, however, came perhaps as more of a shock and a surprise. It was the proposal that the family should be abolished and that women and children should be held in common. This, Plato feels, is not unfeasible and has much to commend it. To begin with, if we are to keep the guardian class up to scratch we must apply to their breeding the same rules that govern the breeding of any prize stock. We must breed solely from the best, and among them from those only who are in their prime. Men should be allowed to beget between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-five, women to bear from twenty to forty. Plato, however, recognizes what so many modern moralists do not—that the exercise of the sexual instinct has besides its result of perpetuating the race the equally important consequence of enriching the individual life. He permits, then, intercourse beyond the age-limit—provided only a strict birth control be practiced and there be no offspring. Obviously a permanent association like that of the family is incompatible with these arrangements. There will be instead periodic pairing festivals at the discretion of the rulers, prompted by the needs of the state, at which individual unions will be determined by lot. The dice, however, will be loaded cleverly, so as to ensure that the best and bravest men draw the finest and fairest women. The children resulting from these passing associations will be taken from their mothers at birth and removed

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 76, 217.

to a state nursery. The offspring of the inferior unions and any deformed infants that may result from the others will be quietly put out of the way. The rest will be brought up by the state and will not know who their fathers and mothers are. In these circumstances, to be sure, it will be difficult to prevent incest. The best we can do is to call all the offspring of any given festival brothers and sisters, forbid their union with one another and with their possible parents, and let it go at that. When sanctioned by the Delphic Oracle, however, the union of brothers and sisters will be allowed.<sup>68</sup>

Plato's audience, however, was to some degree prepared for this wave also by the structure of their society and their particular scale of values, and it cannot have seemed nearly so startling to them as it does to us. Family life was at a minimum, a wife was little more than a household drudge and a necessary instrument of procreation, and the enrichment of life through affection and love came to the Greek almost entirely from his relations with men. Since, then, the springs of his spiritual experience lay largely outside of the "home," the abolition of the family as an institution would have been much less upsetting to his life and less destructive to his finer sensibilities than it would be to ours. The idea, too, was not wholly novel. In Sparta not only were women on a footing of comparative equality with men but the institution of marriage was wholly subordinated to the welfare of the community, and "wives might be lent by their husbands to produce children for the service of the State."<sup>69</sup> Again, at Athens itself the Cynics were openly preaching and trying to practice promiscuity, much more to the amusement, apparently, than to the scandal of their neighbors. And one had only to consult one's Herodotus to learn that among the barbarians, tribes like the Agathyrsians, who lived the simple, natural, Arcadian life so highly approved by Plato, "have their women in common, that they may be brothers to one another."<sup>70</sup>

It is precisely to attain this same idyllic end of universal

<sup>68</sup> V, 457 C-461 E.

<sup>69</sup> Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>70</sup> Herodotus, IV, 104, quoted by Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

brotherhood that Plato advocates his communism. The family, like property, opposes a strong private interest to the public weal, and breeds selfishness and discord in the body politic. Abolish it, and the guardians and auxiliaries become one great family of brothers and sisters bound together by an all-inclusive tie of kinship and actuated by a single set of feelings, standards, and loyalties, shared in common. With the disappearance of private interest, disputes and litigation and crimes of personal violence will also cease. From earliest infancy children will be brought up to share the life of their elders. They will be even taken on military campaigns, though kept at a safe distance from actual battle, and this observation of war will stand them in good stead later on.<sup>71</sup>

The juxtaposition of the ideas of war and brotherhood prompts Plato to make at this point some interesting remarks upon pan-Hellenic unity and the rules that should prevail in a case of a clash between purely Greek states. He feels the isolation of Greece in the midst of a non-Greek world, and has a prophetic sense that one day it may fall under barbarian yoke. In these circumstances the fraternal ideal ought to be extended to all Hellenes. The citizens of an ideal Greek commonwealth will be "lovers of Hellas and think of Hellas as their own land."<sup>72</sup> Greek cities will regard their wars as passing family quarrels. They shall not enslave one another's citizens or devastate one another's territories, nor shall they burn houses and put the population to the sword. Those fallen in battle shall not be despoiled of their arms, nor shall captured arms be offered in temples and displayed as trophies. For it behooves Hellenes to go to war only with barbarians, and even with them the same rules of warfare should hold as already obtain at present among the Greek states.<sup>73</sup>

We are now ready to confront the third and greatest wave, which is about to break upon us. "Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will

<sup>71</sup> V, 462-467.

<sup>72</sup> V, 470.

<sup>73</sup> V, 468-471 C.



never have rest from their evils—no, nor the human race, as I believe,—and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, a thorough training in philosophy must be prescribed by the ideal state as the core and crown of the education of its rulers. Plato is prepared for a chorus of incredulity and dissent, which we too, are perhaps inclined to swell. To us, as to the Greek audience, the philosopher appears the most absent-minded, unpractical, and unbusinesslike of men, and the last to be entrusted with the difficulties and responsibilities of a job like governing. Plato, however, does not flinch. The philosopher, he retorts, is essentially a lover of the truth. He is not an amateur of sights and sounds or a flirter with ill-considered and half-baked theories and opinions, but a mind intent on piercing every sham and show and on getting down to bed-rock. It is the philosopher, then, who makes it his profession to know things as they really are, and who therefore is really best fitted to rule, for all legislation that does not spring from a knowledge of the truth about things is fundamentally shaky and unsound.<sup>75</sup> The government of the ideal state is no place for the wild theories, “isms,” reforms, and political panaceas hatched out by mere impulse and opinion.

In the present state of affairs it is true that where political and moral standards are set by the blind prejudices of that great beast, the people, and where the arts of government and good conduct consist in humoring its whims and averting its furies, the philosopher must appear either a fool or a knave.<sup>76</sup> He is in the position of an expert navigator who finds himself on a ship nominally commanded by a dull, infirm captain, but really at the mercy of an ignorant, mutinous crew, each one of whom considers himself quite capable of steering the vessel into port. Naturally a crowd like that do not believe there is any such thing as a science of navigation, and think the expert himself a useless, prating star-gazer. And, as naturally, the navigator is not going to beg the crew to be commanded by him, nor the philosopher to entreat the world to listen to the

<sup>74</sup> V, 473 C-D.<sup>75</sup> V, 474 C ff.<sup>76</sup> VI, 493 A-C.

truth. He sets the truth before mankind, but it is for them to take it or leave it as they choose.<sup>77</sup>

It is also a fact that philosophers themselves may go to the bad. But this is natural enough. Their characters, being finer, are all the more easily corrupted by the temptations of the world, or by the necessity of associating with the vulgar herd and bowing to popular prejudice and opinion. And, of course, the greater the intellect that is misused, the greater the resultant criminal. Then, too, philosophy is often courted by inferior men, and the offspring is a breed of sophists and the like, running noisily underfoot. It is mostly these superficial busybodies that arouse by their wordy, mechanical imitations of philosophy a popular prejudice against the real article.<sup>78</sup>

Small wonder that in such a world the true philosopher, instead of coming to the fore as he ought and guiding the state, is only too glad to withdraw into obscurity. "He is like one, who in the storm of dust and sleet which the driving wind hurries along retires under the shelter of a wall; and seeing the rest of mankind full of wickedness, he is content, if only he can live his own life and be pure from evil and unrighteousness, and depart in peace and good-will, with bright hopes."<sup>79</sup> Still, this prejudice may in time be overcome by the example and precept of the true philosopher—so the hope that the state may be eventually governed by philosopher-kings is not perhaps altogether vain and impracticable.<sup>80</sup>

To help absorb the shock of this proposal both to ourselves and to the Greek there is one point to be kept in mind. For the Greek the term philosophy had become associated with delvings into the nature of the world-stuff, the results of which made not the slightest difference to every-day life. Whether the world was really made of water, fire, or atoms, or was given an initial shove by mind, or spontaneously whirled into shape, or ran mechanically by its own weight, were speculations devoid of practical application and particularly irrelevant to the problems of human conduct and happiness. So, too, in our

<sup>77</sup> VI, 488 D.

<sup>78</sup> VI, 491-496.

<sup>79</sup> VI, 496 D.

<sup>80</sup> V, 473 D-VI, 502 C.

eyes the proverbial absent-mindedness and remoteness from real life of the philosopher are due largely to the abstract character and remoteness from real life of his subject matter. The "absolutes" proposed by many modern thinkers elude and even contradict every-day experience at every turn. The way to them is so long, so devious, and so difficult, that when we reach them we have frequently lost sight of our starting-point and find it difficult to get back from them to the world about which they are supposed to tell the real truth. But the Platonic Ideas are quite different from the traditional Greek world-stuffs and the modern Absolutes. They are something that the whole flux of appearance, including every act of human life, is continually putting into practice and exemplifying. They do not play hide and seek with experience. They are immediately revealed in it and relevant to it, as the forms and laws and values by which it is organized into a world. Appearance may obscure and distort them, to be sure, but it does not lie about them. So far as it says anything coherent at all, it is telling us what they really are. They are current on the surface of the flux, not concealed in its supposed depths.

Indeed, as we shall soon see, the obviousness of the Ideas and their direct applicability to life have led some critics to maintain that their status for Plato was not that of "meta-physical" entities, but of what we to-day should rather call scientific concepts. In that case, the philosopher, as Plato conceived him, would be more like our modern scientist than our modern metaphysician. To be sure, our scientists are forced to limit their inquiries and meditation to a single, sharply defined sector of the universe, whereas the Platonic philosopher was to take an all-embracing view of the whole world and make himself a spectator of all time and existence. Still, the spirit, the quality, and the status of the results would be in both cases the same.

Moreover, Plato is not content to let his philosopher be even a pure scientist. In raising up his "third wave" he warns us no less strongly against putting knowledge without practical ability at the head of affairs than practical ability without enlightenment. The philosopher whom he proposes as king



is a man of affairs. Government is an applied science, and the ruler must know how to put into practice the truths that the study of philosophy and science has taught him. Very soon we shall find Plato attempting to ensure this union of theory and practice by insisting that the philosopher shall interrupt his study of dialectic with a long period of practical experience in office-holding as part of his distinctive training, and that thereafter his contemplation of the Ideas in the upper world shall be broken from time to time, as his turn comes, by a descent into the "cave" of every-day life, there to apply what he has learned, "toiling at politics and ruling for the public good."<sup>81</sup>

All in all, then, we might not be far wrong in considering the proposal that kings shall be philosophers, and philosophers kings, simply a plea for "scientific management" of the state. Legislators should be men of trained impartiality and justice of vision, versed in the spectacle of all time and existence, and honest and courageous enough to withstand the forces of ignorance and prejudice, and of private, class, and party interests, and to govern in the light of truth for the good of the whole body politic. In the same way, we might feel that Plato's defense of the philosopher against the contempt and mockery of the world is an attempt to justify, not so much metaphysics in the eyes of the man in the street, as the scientific point of view in the face of the credulity and obscurantism of the mass of mankind. If this be true, the third wave, far from overwhelming us, is one that we do not have to breast, but on the crest of which such of us as are enlightened habitually swim. Our great cry, also, is for scientific knowledge and management and for experts as kings, not only in the sphere of government but in every department of moral and social life—or, if that be an ideal laid up in heaven, at least, for common honesty and horse-sense and the nerve to look facts in the face, not askew or askance. And we are only too familiar with the derision, the obloquy, and even the downright attempts at forcible suppression, with which the expression of any enlightened and scientific opinion running counter to the prejudices

<sup>81</sup> VII, 540 B.

of the crowd is greeted by the crew of superstitions, bigotries, political nostrums, and moral and social fads and panaceas that carouse on the poop and quarrel for the helm of some modern ships of state.

Having thus pressed and proved to his own satisfaction the necessity of making the ruling class a race of philosopher-kings, Plato goes on to the programme of higher education specially designed to attain this end. With its gist we are already familiar. It seems to have inspired, we may remember, the curriculum of the Academy, and we outlined it when discussing the course of studies through which Plato put his pupils.<sup>82</sup> The first subject to be taken up after music and gymnastics was arithmetic, which had a double use. In its applied aspect it made for clearness and accuracy of thought, and was also indispensable in the military art. Moreover, it was the beginning of wisdom in that it taught one to distinguish between the visible and the intelligible and to take the first steps in abstract thinking, "compelling the soul to reason about abstract numbers and rebelling," as it did, "against the introduction of visible or tangible objects into the argument."<sup>83</sup> Arithmetic, however, only cleared the ground and sharpened the mind for the more profound subject of geometry, which incidentally, in Plato's day, was almost entirely bi-dimensional and confined to the study of plane surfaces. Geometry, too, was of great practical use, and highly necessary in war, but its chief value lay in the fact that it acquainted the mind with the distinction between the perishable and the eternal and fixed the attention upon imperishable and changeless truths. But Plato was not content with plane geometry. A beginning was being made with the problems of solid geometry, though investigations and teachers of the subject were few and far between. With the difficulties of this new science as well as with the principles of astronomy, or of solids in motion, the would-be philosopher-king must next be disciplined. Astronomy not only had its applications in the study of weather-conditions and the art of navigation, but no more fit symbol of the world of Ideas could be devised than the vision of the starry heaven, "the

<sup>82</sup> Cf. *supra*, pp. 168 ff.

<sup>83</sup> VII, 525-D.

fairest and most perfect of visible things." No one gazing upon it could help being led to meditate upon the eternal and undeviating laws that govern its movements, and upon such abstractions as absolute swiftness and absolute slowness, which are visible only to the eye of reason.<sup>84</sup> Finally, astronomy must be accompanied by its twin, harmonics, which did the same service for the ear by investigating the problems and discovering the eternal laws and natures that have to do with the harmonious motions of sound.<sup>85</sup>

But all these subjects, if studied separately and without reference to one another, were profitless. A means must be found for correlating them, connecting their results, and organizing all knowledge and all truth into a single all-comprehensive, intelligible scheme or Form. This means is philosophy or dialectic. Dialectic is the crown and queen of all the sciences. She alone has the "power of elevating the highest principle in the soul to that which is best in existence," and is the only science that "goes directly to the first principle, and does away with hypotheses in order to make her ground secure; the eye of the soul, which is literally buried in an outlandish slough, is by her gentle aid lifted upwards; and she uses, as handmaids and helpers in the work of conversion, the sciences which we have just been discussing."<sup>86</sup>

The attainment, however, of so lofty, so piercing, and so universal a vision as that of the one absolute Reality will call not only for arduous training but for natural qualities of the highest order. The philosopher-king must have, in addition to all the moral virtues, "keenness and ready powers of acquisition," strength of body and mind, indefatigable industry, and an enormous respect for and love of the unvarnished truth. Naturally, such a character and such knowledge will be long in the building, and must be developed storey by storey from the ground up. The study of the preparatory, mathematical sciences should be begun in early childhood, and by twenty years of age the grasp of their essential principles should be so firm as to permit a beginning of the dialectical task of correla-

<sup>84</sup> VII, 527 D-530 D.

<sup>86</sup> VII, 531 C-533 E.

<sup>85</sup> VII, 530 D-531 C.



tion. At the end of another ten years, those combining the best characters with the greatest capacity for philosophic vision should have been well sifted out, and the most promising men may now be put through a five year course in pure philosophy. Great care, however, must be taken at this stage that their preoccupation with dialectics does not breed a love of tearing everything to pieces and of arguing for the sake of argument. By the time they are thirty-five the chosen band will be of an age when they may suitably put their attainments to practical use. They will go back to the world, hold office, get experience, and show whether they are proof against the demoralizing influences of every-day life. This period will continue for fifteen years. Eventually, when they are fifty, those who have stood the test will retire to final contemplation of the truth and the absolute good; "for that is the pattern according to which they are to order the state, and the lives of individuals, and the remainder of their own lives also." But even in this stage, we may remember, they are to return frequently to the helm of state and rule for the welfare of their people. And, Plato concludes, "when they have brought up in each generation others like themselves and left them in their place to be governors of the state, then they will depart to the Islands of the Blest and dwell there; and the city will give them public memorials and sacrifices, and honor them, if the Pythian oracle consent, as demigods, but if not, as in any case blessed and divine."<sup>87</sup>

If our investigation of the Academy had not prepared us for the course of studies laid down for would-be rulers, the curriculum would strike us at first sight as fantastic. To the modern eye, accustomed to the blinkers of specialization, studies like arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, harmonics, and dialectic seem to have little bearing upon efficiency in kingship. Concentration upon subjects such as political economy, government, constitutional law, and the like would seem more to the point, and would be provided at once by the "educator" of to-day. We are, however, familiar with some of the influences that inspired Plato's schedule, and we know what his reply

<sup>87</sup> VII, 536 D-540 C.

would be.<sup>88</sup> His guardian class were going to pick up plenty of political science willy-nilly, the moment they were turned loose from their five years of dialectic and set to the practical task of governing. Why then waste time in acquiring an academic book knowledge, much of which might prove inapplicable and have to be unlearned? Moreover, even were this not so, the really important thing in training a man to be fit to rule lay not so much in imparting the specialized information connected with his business as in developing within him a certain capacity for grasping and digesting information in general, and extracting from it what was essential. No matter how much particular knowledge he might have, it would be worse than useless unless he were also a man of an accurate, impartial, and unprejudiced habit of thought, accustomed to view experience "under the aspect of eternity" and to infer from it a just and enlightened vision of human well-being and happiness. Without this elevation of point of view in the legislator, legislation, however professional, was bound to be short-sighted, unscientific, and swayed by private interest and partisanship, or even to be out and out cranky, fanatical, and silly. The prime, then, indeed the only problem in educating a man to rule was to raise his mind to the necessary heights and give it a detached and truly kingly survey of man and of the world. If this could be accomplished, special information as to the details of government could be left to be picked up along the way. In modern times the British, acting on this theory, trained their ruling class to discharge the political obligations to which its birth and position engaged it by drilling it in Greek and Latin—and by so doing turned out the finest and the most statesmanlike "guardians" of our day. But Plato, as we once noted, had no "classics" to turn to, which might exercise the mind with difficulties of grammar and translation and at the same time, by holding the glass of a finished past to the blurred and half-formed present, might give focus and perspective to a vision and understanding of the world. Mathematics and dialectic, however, filled the bill for him. Their problems afforded a veritable gymnasium for developing

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *supra*, pp. 164 ff.

power and accuracy of thought. The austerity and abstraction of their concepts, lifted high above the fret and hurry of the flux, were calculated to purge the mind of all meanness, prejudice, and intolerance. They taught one to reflect impersonally and calmly, to go straight to the heart of the matter, and to distinguish the essence from the accident, the changeless and the universal from the relative and the temporary—a habit without which mere information, however bulky, about constitutions and governments would only help darken counsel and kindle illusion. And without the last, dialectical effort of weaving together into one coherent pattern all these immutable values and laws and types, precipitated and isolated from phenomena by the various sciences, how could the mind review sufficient evidence with sufficient poise to estimate justly the true nature of the good and to legislate dispassionately and ruthlessly in its light?

It is, of course, a commonplace that Plato's theory of the state is communistic. But the opinion, if it is based, as it commonly is, upon his advocacy of doing away with the family and with private property, is insecurely founded. Communism is prescribed only for the comparatively small guardian and auxiliary class, while the great majority of the commonwealth are permitted to retain the old domestic, "capitalistic" régime intact, with apparently no interference save for a ban upon too great accumulation of private wealth in the hands of any one individual. And even the prescription of communism for the rulers is a matter of expediency rather than of principle. It happens to be, Plato feels, the kind of life best calculated to breed and foster an efficient governing class, but it is not necessarily the best life for the governed. In short, there is nothing sacred or universal about it. To call, then, the Platonic republic communistic as a whole for including a small, ruling minority subjected to a communistic régime, would be like calling an entire state monastic if it happened to be run by some religious order vowed to celibacy and poverty within its own ranks.

For all that, the Platonic state is socialistic through and through. But its real socialism is not a matter of outward



form but of inward spirit. It lies in the relation that every individual bears to the commonwealth irrespective of class or rule of life. Private property, the family, the ordinary vocations and avocations—all the external structure, that is, of an individualistic, capitalistic régime—may be allowed the lower classes, but no one, however humble, may call his soul his own, or have a private life that the state may not regulate. All the reality and value the individual possesses comes to him from sharing in the state. All that is worth while and of any account in him is exhausted and summed up when we call him a citizen, for he is essentially a mere instance and enactment of the life of his city, and his true and proper happiness and self-realization lie solely in contributing directly to its welfare. Anything in him that his political function and relation could not absorb and express would be accidental and unimportant, an obscuring rather than a showing forth of his essence. That the individual might have real and possibly supreme values in and for himself, which could not be directly socialized and turned to state purposes, was unthinkable.

This denial of the right to individuality and of the value of private life was logical enough. Indeed, Plato could not consistently take any other stand. He was bound to apply to the sphere of human activity his doctrine that the individual object gets whatever being, and worth, and name it possesses from the Type and Form of which it is an instance, and to develop the political and social implications of the reality of the universal and the comparative nonentity of the particular. Moreover, there was one state in Greece whose organization was not so far from his ideal, and the way it worked was calculated to confirm in his eyes the superiority of the constitution he proposed. There were sound reasons for admiring Sparta, quite apart from the fact that her scheme of government at its best fell but one remove short of the perfect commonwealth. Her communistic system with its utter subjection of the individual to the state and its complete invasion of his privacy still bred, in spite of the growing infection of plutocracy, a race of blood and iron, frugal, hardy, courageous, orderly, and blindly devoted to the fatherland. And after the

War the strength and advantage of these qualities stood out triumphantly, in signal contrast to the disorder, the softness, and the disruptive individualism of the Athenian democracy, which not only had wrecked the Empire by its folly and incompetence, but apparently had learned little or nothing from the lesson.

The bitterer fruits borne by this simple and rugged stock—its hardness, its brutality, its disparagement of culture and indifference to enlightenment—might well seem insignificant or accidental beside those of victory. No wonder, then, that Plato, seeing the efficiency and the real virtues of the Spartan system, and unmindful of its deadening effect upon the higher reaches and finer accomplishments of the spirit, felt that although the ideal commonwealth was laid up in heaven, the next best sort of constitution was giving a good account of itself on earth.

As time went on, we shall see, Plato became less visionary and more practical. The Academy was primarily a School of Political Administration and had to face facts that theories would not always fit, so it will not surprise us to find him slowly coming down to earth, and eventually summing up the results of his gradual disillusionment in the *Laws*, his last work, where he abandons the ideal and discusses the form of government best adapted in his opinion to existing conditions. Moreover, the *Republic* itself was launched upon a sea of troubles. Rival political theories were already in the field to challenge his conclusions—and to be challenged by them. The doctrines of Thrasymachus and Callicles were still fresh in men's minds, and while Plato was holding forth at the Academy the Cynics were running about town, not only attacking the reality of the Ideas, but drawing from their own "nominalism" an individualistic theory of society and the state that bordered on anarchism. The Cyrenaics had their brand of nominalism, too, which was openly more destructive, and their obviously bored though well-bred tolerance of the state carried a subtle poison more deadly than the earnest negations of Antisthenes and his followers.

The controversy in which we find Plato and his old Socratic

schoolmates engaged is hydra-headed and everlasting. We to-day still bitterly debate whether the state is the creature of the individual or the individual of the state. We affirm or deny, if need be with force or riot, the right of the government to invade the home and regulate the private life of the particular citizen in the name of the public good. We fight shoulder to shoulder with the forces that make for standardization, or we resent them with all our heart and soul and strength. But to the philosophic eye we are, when all is said and done, merely wrangling without knowing it over the Platonic doctrine that the particular has being and value only in so far as it realizes a type and conforms to a universal. Indeed, when the tumult and the shouting of the World War has died away, it may appear to the historian of the future that the conflict was in its most important features a phase of the old realistic-nominalistic controversy, and that the real issue at stake was not so much the life or the death of nations as whether individualism and all it stands for should survive or the Platonic political realism be imposed by force upon the world. For the Prussian view of the relations of the individual to the state was at heart Platonic and Spartan, and the Fatherland exhibited many of the virtues and vices—the discipline, the orderliness, the energy and efficiency, the prying police regulation, the subjection of the civil to the military—of its earthly Hellenic prototype. The triumph of German Kultur, then, would have meant an enthronement of the old scholastic realism with its general philosophy of the universal as alone possessed of true being, and its political corollary of the utter dependence of the particular citizen upon the state for his right to existence.

But, even as it is, that realism is for the moment in the ascendant. Fascism and Bolshevism are more extreme and more avowed examples of it than ever the German state dreamed of being. It is also interesting to note that America, who at the time of her entrance into the War conceived herself to be combatting an ideal rather than a people, should all the while have been developing in a form thinly yet sufficiently disguised by the enchanting words “democracy” and “Americanism” the very ideal against which she fought. Her passion for standard-



ization and her intolerance of variety, her multiform scorn and invasion of personal privacy, her willingness to regulate by law the most intimate concerns of the individual in the supposed interests of a petty moralism, her inclination towards theocracy, her impatience with the idea that minorities have rights, and her acceptance and justification of despotism, provided only the despot be called "a majority"—all these betray the growth of a political sentiment in which the community is slowly acquiring a priority of existence and value over the individual, and reducing him to a mere member and instance of itself, and nothing more. And she vaunts the superiority of "Americanism" in the face of the rest of the world, much as Germany boasted of the superiority of her "Kultur."

To be sure, these tendencies are being withstood in America more or less successfully by the tradition of personal liberty. There is a general rebellion all along the line against standardization and community control of the thought and speech, the habits and the life, of the individual, with the result that the United States have now become the chief battlefield of the realistic-nominalistic controversy in its sociological form. But if "realism" wins out, we may expect to see "Americanism," along with Fascism and Bolshevism, take the place of "Kultur" as the next great modern expression of the Platonic idea of the state—minus, it is to be feared, the philosopher-kings, and the wisdom and justness of oversight and direction for which they stood.

## v

We have been for a long time in a position to discover the nature of justice, and we now turn back to follow the main scent. To pick it up again is easy. The state, as Plato has developed it, is ideal, and, being ideal, it will have the great virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and, of course, justice. If we can eliminate the other virtues one by one, we shall necessarily come upon justice as the residue. Let us tackle wisdom first. Obviously we do not mean by it a specialized technical knowledge of how best to perform some one function

of social life, like a knowledge of agriculture or of carpentering. We mean political wisdom, or the knowledge of how to run the whole state in the best possible way for all its citizens. Such wisdom will be lodged in a comparatively small, specially endowed and trained group, who by virtue of possessing it will alone be capable of governing the state as an ideal state should be governed. In short, it will be the particular and distinguishing virtue of the guardian class.

Similarly, the reputation of the state for courage or cowardice will not depend upon the general animal bravery or timidity of its citizens.<sup>89</sup> The blind ferocity of the wild beast or the slave will not avail of itself to save the commonwealth. True courage is, as we should say, moral courage. It consists in a knowledge of what things are truly to be feared and in an unshrinking determination to do the right thing, whatever the seeming cost may be.<sup>90</sup> Only by the possession of such a quality can the state hope to make correct estimates of perilous situations and to deal with them wisely and successfully. But obviously such knowledge, like political wisdom, is professional, not universal. To develop it the greatest care must be exercised in choosing fit material and in training it to implicit obedience, come what may, to the behests of the guardians. This picked and highly disciplined body of young men, imbued with courage as its peculiar virtue, will form the soldiery.<sup>91</sup>

Finally we have temperance or self-control. This means obviously the control of the lower part of one's nature by the higher, since both are equally part of oneself. Now in the state the lower side of human nature is apt to be more highly developed in the lower classes, whereas refinement and simplicity and moderation are usually a prerogative of the few who are best born and best educated. Temperance, then, in the state will mean a general recognition of the authority of the upper classes and of the right of the wisest and the best to rule the less educated and less self-controlled masses. This

<sup>89</sup> IV, 427 C-429 A.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Nettleship, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>91</sup> IV, 429 B-430 C.

recognition will be mutual, will be a willingness of the lower classes to be led, and of the aristocracy to live up to the responsibility for good government laid upon it. So temperance, unlike wisdom and courage, will not be the virtue of a special class. It will be a spirit pervading the whole state—a spirit of agreement all around, based upon a clear perception on the part of all classes that some men are better than others, and that it is the business of the good citizen to find out what his real value is, to acknowledge frankly superiority in others where it exists, and to be ready to trust the judgment of men better qualified than he.<sup>92</sup>

Our quarry, justice, must by this time be pretty well surrounded and run to earth. Indeed, says Plato, there she is, tumbling out at our feet, and what is more she has been in plain sight this long time, if only we had had eyes in our heads. The virtues that we have just been discussing all have one underlying thought and principle—that every man has a particular aptitude and a particular place in the state, and that he should find that place and stick to it and not try to do things for which he is unfitted. The man whose talents and education make him a good ruler will not repine because he is not also a first-class cobbler or soldier, but neither will the good cobbler or soldier think that he can also govern. Each class has its special virtue and function, in the possession and exercise of which it should be content. For, when a man whom nature made a good artisan gets puffed up with wealth and popularity, and tries to force his way into a position of high military or political authority for which he is utterly unsuited, or when one and the same man wants to do and be everything, it is the ruination of the commonwealth. The ideal and just state, then, will be one in which each man has and minds his own business and does not meddle with that of others. And political righteousness will consist in the harmonious working together of all individuals and classes which naturally results from a man's knowing what he is good for, and from his being willing to continue in the station to which it has pleased God to call him and make the best of it.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>92</sup> IV, 213 D-432 A.

<sup>93</sup> IV, 432 B-434 C.



If now we apply to the individual this definition of justice as a harmony of the whole in which all parts get their due and perform their specific function without interfering with or encroaching upon one another, we shall find that the shoe fits. In the first place we can prove, though the proof is somewhat complicated, that the soul has three parts or principles corresponding to the three classes in the state. If two things really contradict one another and pull the soul in opposite directions, they must spring from different sources. Now, the blind promptings of hunger and thirst and of our other appetites are opposed in this absolute way to the reflective and restraining influence of thought and reason. We may then distinguish in the soul between reason on the one hand and appetite on the other. But the soul is not exhausted by these two principles. There is a dynamic, passionate element which frequently is at war with desire—an anger, a determination, an uprising and revulsion of spirit that causes a man to grit his teeth and to fight his appetites to death, or to kick himself afterwards for a fool if he has given in to them. This emotional, "spirited," volitional element cannot be called desire or appetite, for it can be used against the desires and the solicitation of pleasure and pain. Nor can it be identified with reason, for it is found in brutes and in children in whom reason is as yet undeveloped. It must then be a third element in the soul.<sup>94</sup>

A parallel between the state and the soul is now easily drawn, and justice in the individual is quickly discovered. Reason, whose specific virtue is wisdom and whose natural prerogative is to organize and rule the whole of the individual's life with a view to his total career, obviously corresponds to the governing class in the commonwealth. Passion, spirit, determination, in the individual is no less obviously the counterpart of the soldiery, whose peculiar virtue is courage, and it should, like the military class, be subject to and guided by reason. Finally, the appetites that preside over the economy of a man's body may be properly likened to the producing classes in the body politic. Reason and spirit brought into accord by a sound education will combine to restrain and

<sup>94</sup> IV, 434 D-441 C.

direct them, just as the guardians and the army conjointly keep the lower classes in place. And when the appetites escape from the control of the higher faculties and enslave and rule their natural-born rulers, or in other words, when a man lacks self-control and temperance, their dominance will work the same ruination in the individual that the desire for power by the masses works in the state. The individual, then, is wise, when he has in him "that little part which knows what is for the interest of each of the three parts of the whole;" he is courageous when his spirit retains in pleasure and pain the commands of reason about what he ought and ought not to fear; and he is self-controlled, or temperate, when his spirit, or determination, and his desires are equally agreed that reason ought to rule, and do not rebel against its dictates. Finally his justice or righteousness, like that of the state, will consist in a smooth and frictionless co-operation of his three parts, in which each mind its own business, whether of ruling or being ruled, and abstains from meddling with another's. In short, to quote Plato's own words, the righteous or "just man does not permit the several elements within him to interfere with one another, or any of them to do the work of others—he sets in order his own inner life and is his own master and his own law, and at peace with himself. . . . When he has bound all these together and is no longer many but has become one entirely temperate and perfectly adjusted nature, then he proceeds to act . . . always thinking and calling that which preserves and co-operates with this harmonious condition, just and good action, and the knowledge which presides over it, wisdom, and that which at any time impairs this condition, he will call unjust action, and the opinion which presides over it, ignorance."<sup>95</sup> Conversely, unrighteousness will be "a strife which arises among the three principles—a meddlesomeness, and interference, and rising up of a part of the soul against the whole, an assertion of unlawful authority, which is made by a rebellious subject against a true prince, of whom he is the natural vassal." For "what is this confusion and delusion but

<sup>95</sup> IV, 441 C-444 A (phrases have also been introduced from Jowett's translation without direct quotation).

injustice and intemperance and cowardice and ignorance and every form of vice?"<sup>96</sup>

The analogy, however, between the soul and the state is not yet exhausted. In our search for the nature of justice we have dwelt upon one form of political constitution only, the ideal form, in which power is entrusted by the people, willingly and as a matter of course, to those best fitted by ability, patriotism, and breadth of vision to govern in the interest of the whole state. This sort of constitution is admittedly a counsel of perfection, a pattern laid up in heaven and nowhere completely exemplified on earth.<sup>97</sup> The nearest approach to it is government by an enlightened monarch or by an aristocracy worthy of the name, just as the man who comes closest to the ideal is the one in whom reason is most dominant. But there are at least four other types of political constitution, which may be arranged in a descending series, and corresponding to them we shall find four kinds of inner life, which may be described as so many stages in a progressive corruption and degradation of the soul.<sup>98</sup>

The first downward step in society and the individual leads to what Plato calls timocracy—a condition in which reason no longer sets the ideal but is made subservient and auxiliary to the pursuit of a goal set by ambition for worldly honors and success. In the state this condition arises from faulty breeding and lack of birth control in the guardian class and from the consequent production of men of a rougher calibre. These individuals are still possessed, to be sure, of the military virtues of discipline and respect for authority, but they are covetous, openly, of distinction, and secretly, of wealth, and suspicious and disdainful of a wisdom that is not used for material advancement. In the hands of such a class the state, while retaining its organization, cohesion, and efficiency, loses its interest in the higher values that constitute true civilization and becomes imperialistic, bumptious, and warlike, a worshipper of efficiency, big business, and expansion.<sup>99</sup> Crete and Sparta

<sup>96</sup> IV, 444 B.

<sup>97</sup> IX, 592 B.

<sup>98</sup> IV, 445 C ff. VIII, 544 A–545 C.

<sup>99</sup> VIII, 545 B–548 D.



are good examples of a state of this sort, Plato tells us.<sup>100</sup> And it is probable that the further decline of simplicity and communism at Lacedaemon, consequent upon the growth of empire, was not without influence upon his description of the next stage of political degeneration, the rise of plutocracy.<sup>101</sup>

The "timocratic" individual, like the "timocratic" government, is one whose reasoning powers no longer direct spirit and ambition, but become their servant and a mere means to their realization. Such a man is apt to be bluff and burly, keen on sports and soldiering, a respecter of persons, eager for the marks of material success, with an eye to the main chance, particularly as he grows older, and with no idealistic nonsense about him. He is frequently the son of some guardian of the old school that sees things in their true perspective and is consequently indifferent to riches and worldly achievement. But the mother is forever complaining to the boy that his father is "only half a man and far too easy going, adding all the complaints about her own ill treatment which women are so fond of rehearsing," or else he is egged on by some old family servant with stories of how easy a mark the master is, and how he is always being "done" by his smarter neighbors. About town, too, he sees that "those who do their own business in the city are called simpletons and held in no esteem, while the busybodies are honoured and applauded." In spite then of his father's influence, his respect for high-mindedness and nobility of vision is shaken, and his ideals become worldly. He has enough reason and wisdom to prevent him from going to the dogs, but not enough to keep him from striving for the things that common men prize.<sup>102</sup>

A natural outcome of this materialistic outlook on life is keenness about money, and thus both the state and the individual sink to the next level of degradation, which Plato calls oligarchy, but which we should perhaps call plutocracy. The class best fitted to govern, discouraged by the fickleness of their constituents and the instability of political office, now go into

<sup>100</sup> VIII, 544 C-545 A.

<sup>101</sup> Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 250, Adam ed. *Republic*, Vol. II, p. 219, note.

<sup>102</sup> VIII, 546 D-550 B.

trade and roll up private wealth, and the more they think of making a fortune, the less they think of virtue and even of such material ways of outdoing their neighbors as fame and glory. The plutocratic ideal quickly infects all classes. Wealth is universally looked up to, a property qualification is required for office, and the rich man, whatever his abilities as a ruler may be, is chosen as governor. Moreover, the state falls apart into two classes, the rich and the poor, who are always at loggerheads. The upper classes, diverted by their newly acquired business interest from their proper function of government, think only of making money, and, growing avaricious, do their best to evade their taxes and shirk their due part of the financial burden. Then, too, having become too soft to fulfil their function of defending the state, they are forced to arm the masses in an emergency, and thus they raise up against themselves an internal enemy more to be feared than any outer foe. Meantime, at the other end of the scale poverty breeds pauperism, and pauperism discontent and all sorts of crime, and a class of "drones" comes into existence, always out of a job and ready to do any mischief with their idle hands.

The degeneration of the individual character is a pocket edition of that of the state. The "oligarchic" or "plutocratic" man comes into being through the ruin of a materially ambitious and glory-loving father. As he inherits no noble ideals and has lost the consolations of philosophy, he feels that he can make good only by devoting himself entirely to some trade through which he can amass a fortune. Money becomes his one passion, and to accumulate it he will resort to anything. Virtue with him is enforced and hypocritical, springing not from reason but from fear and external compulsion. Culture and the other refinements of existence he scorns utterly, since they do not pay dividends and bring in profits. In a word, avarice takes the place of ambition in his character, and he becomes mean and miserly, intent only on accumulating wealth and with no thought or knowledge of how to spend it and get something for it. And to this ignoble end his whole nature, reason, spirit, and appetite, is wholly enslaved.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>103</sup> VIII, 550 B-555 A.

Upon this political and mental condition the third degree of corruption, democracy, follows hard. In the state the rift between wealth and poverty is always increasing, and the ranks of the poor are constantly being recruited by the ruin and fall of the rich, who are all the more bitter and dangerous because of their former prosperity. The upper classes, on their side, especially the young, become more and more luxurious, idle, and insolent. Eventually the masses discover the weakness and softness hidden behind the show and "side" of their rulers, and the slightest thing precipitates a revolution that brings the masses into power. But the resulting "democracy" is worse, even, than plutocracy. In plutocracy there was at least some cohesion, some focus, some unifying end, however mean and far from the true good it might be. But with the state in the hands of a proletariat wholly ignorant of the higher values and fooled by the magic name of freedom individualism goes on the rampage. Every one does what he likes, with no regard for the law or the welfare of society, and with no respect for principles or standards of any sort. Call it liberty and democracy, if you will, but it is really anarchy. Plato here is undoubtedly expressing not only his own but his master's opinion about democracy, and we may recall from a previous chapter the scathing passages he puts into Socrates' mouth.<sup>104</sup>

This picture, provoked by the condition into which the Athenian democracy had fallen, has its counterpart in the moral chaos that reigns in the inner life of a "democratically" constituted man. After a brief struggle with the avaricious propensities handed down by his father the life of pleasure, suggested by boon companions, gains the day, and the check impressed upon his appetites by his over-thrifty and penurious inheritance is flung to the winds. Wisdom and philosophy, ambition and love of honor, are beyond his ken, so that once the restraint of avarice is removed his soul has all the room in the world for the invading horde of desires and pleasures that now enter in and lord it over him. He becomes the abiding place of "insolence and anarchy and waste and impudence" decked

<sup>104</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 7.



out with the fine names of breeding, "liberty, liberality, and courage." He simply "lives from day to day indulging the appetites of the hour." His will, like the will of the people under a democratic form of government, expresses itself in impulsive and unreflective acts, not in enlightened and consistent legislation. He flies from one extreme to another, trying his hand at vice, virtue, debauch, abstinence, athletics, idleness, philosophy, politics, soldiering, business, and what not, according as the whirligig of his caprice flies round. His life has no point, no focus, nothing to organize and steady it. It is "motley and manifold and an epitome of the lives of the many." If he pulls himself up at all, it is at the best by a mere balance of pleasures, none of which he despises, and all of which he indulges equally. "And this distracted existence he terms joy and bliss and freedom."<sup>105</sup>

But the worst is yet—and quick—to come. There is one thing worse than democracy, and that is tyranny. And into tyranny democracy, betrayed by the very liberty that is its chief boast, naturally lapses. For the license engendered by liberty breaks down all respect and reverence of the young for the old, the son for the father, the woman for her husband, the slave for his master, the governed for those whom they single out as governors. Nor does democracy do away with class distinctions or abolish poverty. On the contrary, we still have a lower, working class, which makes up the great majority of the state, and a small upper, well-to-do element. Moreover, there will be the same old swarm of "drones"—spendthrifts, paupers, crooks, parasites, and the like—that were the curse of a plutocracy. But, whereas under a plutocratic régime they were kept out of office, in a democratic state they become politicians and form a kind of third party which holds the balance of power and practically runs things. These gentlemen pose as champions of the masses, and their favorite trade is advocating confiscatory measures for squeezing the rich. They pretend that they wish to equalize wealth and distribute it among the poor, but most of what they squeeze goes into their own pockets. The rich in their turn organize themselves

<sup>105</sup> XIII, 355 A-562 A.

against the poor for self-protection, and a scandalous state of plot and counter-plot, of "impeachments and judgments and trials of one another" ensues. In these circumstances it is not difficult for some rascal to constitute himself a sort of *tribunus plebis*, foment a revolution, demand a bodyguard as a protection against the enemies of the people, and eventually seize the supreme power, just as Plato's pet aversion, Dionysius I of Syracuse, to whom this account is obviously dedicated, had done. At first the newly fledged tyrant curries favor with the masses by liberating debtors and distributing land. But at the same time he does his best to keep them poor in order to render them innocuous, and he plunges the state into war after war so that his leadership may be required. The best and the noblest of his erstwhile supporters he gets rid of, and he purges the country of all that is best in it. In their place he surrounds himself with satellites of his own creation—the worst "drones" of all—and with their help and that of his bodyguard he can put down any attempt of the lower classes to rise against him and dethrone him. So the people find too late that in trying to escape the smoke they have fallen into the fire.<sup>106</sup>

The kind of inner life that corresponds to tyranny in the state means the complete domination of the individual by all that is worst in him. The "democratic" man at least wavered and alternated between good and evil, and by balancing his pleasures against one another attained a certain equilibrium of life. In him the wild beast latent in all of us only peered out in sleep, as Plato remarks in a quite Freudian way. But the tyrannical man has no "censor" to keep the unconscious from becoming conscious, and is completely off his head. He is the victim of a mania, generally of lust, and to satisfy it he will stop at nothing. He has no inhibitions to restrain him, and he becomes "always and in waking reality" what the ordinary man "is very rarely and in dream only." It is his like that make up the criminal element in a state—the "mercenary soldiers, thieves, burglars, cut-purses, foot-pads, robbers of temples, man stealers" . . . informers, bearers of false witness, bribe-takers, and the like.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> VIII, 562 A–569 C, cf. IX, 575 C–578 B.

<sup>107</sup> IX, 571 A–575 B.

As tyranny is the most miserable of all forms of government and the farthest removed from the ideal of constitutional monarchy, so the "tyrannical" inner life is the most miserable of lives, full of meanness and a slave to madness. But most terrible of all is it when a man of this sort is raised to power as a tyrant. The evils of tyranny are then seen in their extreme form, and nothing could be worse than the spectacle of a man unable to rule himself put into a position where he has to try to rule others. A tyrant in name, he is in fact a slave, living ever in fear, forced to lick the boots of the vilest of mankind, and full of desires that he cannot satisfy. Day by day he must perforce become "more jealous, more faithless, more unjust, more friendless, more impious," if he is to maintain himself in power.<sup>108</sup>

We have now followed to the limit the progressive degeneration of both the state and the individual, and we are ready to draw our moral. Three points particularly have been brought out. In the first place we have further refutation of the old argument advanced by Thrasymachus and Polus that might is right and that the unjust are happier than the just. The best and most just man has been shown to be the happiest, and the worst and the most unjust man to be also the most miserable. Again, we have established reason in the individual and the philosopher in the state as the sole arbiter of what is best. The threefold constitution of the soul and of the body politic confirms the truth of the Pythagorean division of all men into lovers of wisdom, lovers of honor, and lovers of gain. Each class, of course, will praise its particular kind of life as pleasantest and belittle the pursuits and pleasures of the others. But the philosopher, the lover of wisdom, has a great advantage. He has tasted the other delights and reflected upon them, whereas the lovers of honor and of gain do not as a rule learn anything of "the sweetness of learning and knowing truth." But the pleasures of which the wise man, with all his breadth of experience and his depth of insight, most approves are the pleasures of thought and reflection. Hence these pleasures must be adjudged the best.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> IX, 575 C-580 A.

<sup>109</sup> IX, 580 A-583 B.



As his third point, Plato re-examines pleasure as a candidate for the good, in the light of the tripartite division of the soul. Perhaps his hedonistic friends were giving his ethical theories a rough time of it, and their objections had to be dealt with. In any case he returns to the attack from a new angle. Pleasures and pains, he points out, are very deceptive. Mere cessation of pain is often considered pleasurable, and *vice versa*. But it cannot be really so, for both pleasure and pain are motions or activities of the soul, and cessation of a motion is rest, not another movement. Moreover, psychologically speaking, pleasure is a positive quality, and its pleasurable-ness in no wise depends upon the contrast of pain preceding or following it. When, therefore, we seem to find pleasure in the mere stopping of pain, we are really being fooled. We are comparing the absence of one feeling with the presence of another, a state of motion with one of rest, and are tricked into believing a mere appearance to be a reality. Furthermore the mere anticipation of pleasure or pain is often imagined to be the thing itself, and here again we are victims of a deception, mistaking in this case a state of rest for one of motion, and a neutral condition of consciousness unprovoked by external stimulus for a case of well-founded, positive feeling.

The psychology of this is all very dubious and difficult, though Plato seems to have in mind the distinction that we, too, make between real and imaginary fears, pains, and the like.<sup>110</sup> But the point to which the discussion leads is obvious. In the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* we learned that pleasure is not the judge of its own goodness. Now we find that it is not even the judge of its own reality. Just as there a further criterion was necessary to determine what pleasures are preferable, so here it is needed in order to decide what pleasures are really pleasures. In the one case as in the other it is reason that comes to the rescue. Obviously the pleasures that arise from the less real part of ourselves will themselves have less reality. The body, being subject to change and corruption, is farther removed from true being than the soul, whose delight lies in contemplating the eternal and the changeless. Bodily

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Nettleship, *op. cit.*, pp. 323 ff.

satisfactions and pleasures, then, will belong to the realm of appearance and will be full of deception. Similarly the longings and delights of the heart whose ambitions are set on the glories of this world also move on the plane of sensible phenomena and share their unreality. It is to the soul, whose essence comes nearer to true being and whose concern is with real existence, that we must look for the real pleasures of wisdom and virtue as compared with the illusory delights of the senses and of material success. The pleasures of thought are pure and unmixed. They cannot be mistaken for mere cessation of pain, for no pain or want precedes them. Neither are they followed by a sense of surfeit and tedium. Furthermore, it is upon reason and knowledge that we must also depend to choose from the lower and less real satisfactions, connected with the body and with material ambitions, those that are natural and necessary to a composite being situated as man is, and that are therefore best and most real of their kind.<sup>111</sup> Virtue and justice, indeed, just because they mean giving each part of human nature its due, as well as keeping each to its place, produce the maximum of pleasure all round.<sup>112</sup> Once again, then—and Plato reiterates the point at length and indulges in some symbolic mathematical computation to prove it—Thrasymachus is wrong both politically and ethically. Cold figures show how many times happier the constitutional monarch is than the tyrant, and how much more pleasurable the practice of justice is than that of injustice.<sup>113</sup>

We have now reviewed the earlier material bearing upon Plato's moral theory, and are in a position to summarize our results to date. We shall make things plainest to ourselves, perhaps, if we regard his ethics as having two sides, a defensive and a constructive, remembering, of course, that they are so interlocked as to form a single line of thought. On the one hand, we have found him launching attack after attack upon the Sophist—Cyrenaic Hedonism, which apparently was an active and dangerous foe and gave him no peace. On the other, we have seen him building up and strengthening behind

<sup>111</sup> IX, 580 D-586 E.

<sup>113</sup> IX, 587 A-592 B.

<sup>112</sup> IX, 586 E-587 A.

this offensive-defensive his own position regarding the nature of the good. His criticism of Hedonism we need not review. Pleasure has a Freudian fascination, and everything connected with it naturally sticks in the memory. Moreover, we shall return to it in a moment, when we come to the *Philebus*, where Plato takes up its claims for the last time and gives them a final weighing against those of wisdom or reason to be the preponderant element in the good. For the moment we are only concerned to sum up the more positive and constructive aspect of his theory, and to this we turn.

Very early in his examination of Hedonism, as we have seen, Plato found himself thrown back upon a standard quite independent of pleasurable-ness for determining whether a given pleasure was good or not. But what was this standard? In the so-called "Socratic" dialogues and in the *Protagoras* he had proved to his own satisfaction against the Sophists that the virtues are really one, and that their principle of unity is knowledge of man's best interests. But Socrates himself, or at least Socrates as he is usually and more conservatively portrayed, never gave any clear picture of what those best interests are. Plato undertakes to answer this question by a thorough examination of human nature. In the *Gorgias* he points out that just as each organ in the human body has a specific operation or virtue expressive of its nature, so the human being as a whole may be expected to have a distinctive human function, the fulfilment of which will bring happiness. The man in whose career this function is expressing itself will be virtuous, or, to use the Platonic term, "just." But a study of human nature shows it to be composite. Society is composed of many individuals, the individual of many impulses. Hence the proper function of human nature will also necessarily be complex. It will not lie in the exercise of any one element to the exclusion or harm of the others, but in a harmonious co-operation of all elements, so that each sticks to its own place, attends to its own business, and receives its due share in the fulfilment of the whole. Incidentally, this manifold but harmonious operation of a man's total nature, like the healthy activity of a special organ, will be attended by



pleasure, which is added to it as a kind of prize or pay for suitable functioning. But the harmony is not sought for the sake of the pleasure that accompanies it, but because it is the natural end at which human activity is aimed. Indeed, pleasures will be judged good or bad according as they vibrate in unison or are discordant with it.

Righteousness or "justice," then, will be a harmony of the different impulses that compose the total individual will, and of the individual wills that make up the community. But how are we to tell real harmony from real discord? The two may not be so easy to distinguish. The moral ear, like the physical, may conceivably differ in different individuals, communities, and times. Shall we not be forced therefore either to seek a still further standard for distinguishing the harmonious from the discordant—which might lead us on *ad infinitum*, or perhaps back to pleasure—or else return to the old Sophist doctrine of moral relativity from which we started?

Whether or not Plato sees the possible threat of such an objection, he forestalls it by appealing to experience. The various stages in the corruption of the state and of the soul seem designed to show the kinds of life in which there can be no real harmony, and therefore by implication the only sort of society and individual in which it can be found. Take, for example, a life governed by the play of desire. It is notorious that the appetites, if left to themselves, produce not order but anarchy. In their headlong rush towards satisfaction they get in each other's way and block each other's fulfilment. Moreover, the ends on which they are set prove will-o'-the-wisps, and the seeming pleasures that accompany them turn out only too frequently to be mere negative cessations of want and pain. A life ruled by them will be at the best a hit-and-miss affair always dominated for the moment by the latest impulse. At the worst, it will mean abandonment to the tyranny of one devouring mania. If will and reason are to be dragged in the train of the appetites, no harmony or balance of any sort can result.

The same is the case when a man allows himself to be run away with by his natural proclivity to strive, and compete, and win out, and get to the top. The will to succeed, if left to

itself, is apt to be fascinated by the glories of this world and to stake human happiness upon the precarious and hollow satisfactions of material accomplishment. Ambitions like those for fame and wealth introduce, to be sure, some sort of perspective into life, but a perspective whose falsity is betrayed by the fickleness of fortune and of popularity. No real harmony can come of enslaving the intelligence and mortifying the appetites and the affections in the interest of money-making, or office-holding, or climbing to any purely mundane eminence.

In fine, we may say with authority that it is impossible for any human being, whatever his place, time, nation, and circumstances may be, to make the best of himself and get the most out of life, unless he exercises thought and intelligence and is guided by them. The mere process of elision, then, leaves us with the man dominated by reason as the sole candidate for complete harmony and righteousness of character. It remains for us now to see whether a searching examination of the activity of reason will bear out this claim and justify us in believing that perhaps, at last, we have found the truly and universally good element in human life. In opening our inquiry we are at once struck with the fact that reason has characteristics not found in the other constituents of human nature. In the first place, it is a natural-born ruler and harmonizer—which the others are not. Make the natural appetites or ambitions their own masters, and they only succeed in stultifying themselves because of their inborn shortsightedness and impetuosity. If they are to get the most out of themselves and realize even frankly sensual or worldly ends, they must go to reason for advice and guidance and place themselves unreservedly in its hands. Hence reason is an indispensable factor in organization and harmony of any sort. But thought and reflection are more than mere means. They form a third element in human nature, and their exercise in and for themselves might claim *a priori* to be at least as much of an end, and as much a part of the total self-realization of a man's life, as sensual satisfaction or material success. When we come to test this claim we find it more than substantiated. Thinking just for the fun of it proves to be a source of im-

mense and never-failing delight. To survey the world as a whole, to see through it, to ferret out its true values and run down the reality that lurks behind the appearance, is one of the most exciting and compelling of human activities. And correspondingly, so far as his inner and moral being is concerned, the power whose exercise raises man above the other animals, gives him a God, and makes him a creature himself half divine, lies just in his ability to transcend through memory and anticipation the immediate moment of experience and to survey his particular life from the heights of reason as a career with a plan and goal. Nor is there anything more seductive and thrilling to him than the sport of creating himself in the image of that vision, and of realizing in himself the most and the best of which his species is capable. Thinking and living in accordance with thought are the most important things that we are wound up to do, and any interference with them throws all our other functions and our whole life out of gear. Moreover, they can go on independent of external circumstance, unaffected by the failure of the senses and the vicissitudes and unkindness of life. The pleasures, too, with which the functioning of reason is paid ring true. The never-blunted edge of their keenness, their freedom from admixture of pain or aftermath of satiety, their permanence and reliability, standing out as they do in sharp contrast to the unstable, passing, deceptive rewards of worldly achievement and of the indulgence of the appetites, attest that they spring from an intercourse of what is essential in man with what is essential in the universe. In a truly righteous and harmonious life, then, the satisfactions that arise from the exercise of thought and intelligence are the satisfactions that should come first. Where there is a conflict or a discord that can only be resolved by elimination and suppression, all else must be sacrificed to them. Because of the superior sweetness and richness of their tones, it is their responsibility and prerogative to set and voice the *leit-motif*, which it is the business of the will to reinforce and of the senses to embroider. Only in a disordered life will the accompaniment be allowed to drown the theme.

But the exaltation above all else in human nature of the worth



and goodness of thinking must not be interpreted, for the moment at least, in too narrow and intellectual a sense. There are, to be sure, some tendencies in Plato, which we shall presently note, to contrast the faculty of thought to our other activities in a dualistic way, as a principle of good set over against a principle of evil. But the life of reason, as Plato is now developing it, is something far wider and with no dualistic implications. It is the harmony of many different instruments, not the solo performance of one side only of our nature. It is not thinking to the exclusion of all other activities, but thinking in the service of the completest possible expression of every interest. A man who found no place in his career for the world or the flesh would be unbalanced. Human nature, being possessed of a body, passions, and parts, and being placed in a material environment, is rounded out and enriched by the exercise of the senses and the physical functions, and by worldly activity and achievement. Hence for reason to attempt to oust emotion, interest in the world, and bodily appetite and pleasure from life would be almost as irrational as for desire and passion to seek to banish reason.

Moreover, it is a characteristic feature of reason that it is the only faculty capable of just this moderation and unselfishness. The senses, the passions, and the ambitions can only assert themselves by enslaving all else to their particular ends. But reason somehow expresses and asserts itself by subordinating the demands of the other sides of our nature, not to its own particular interest in thinking, but to the self-realization of the whole of human nature. And to this larger whole it also instinctively subordinates itself. Its highest satisfaction, in fact, lies just in assuring the greatest good of the greatest number of the functions that make up the human being—of which it itself is one. The very essence of reason is the balance and proportion of all the elements, including itself, with which it works. It is like the first violinist who sometimes leads the orchestra in which he also plays. He, too, carries the air and makes the dominant contribution to which all else must be subjected. And yet in his directing he subjects his own playing, as well as that of the other instruments, to a harmony that

includes and expresses them all. The life, then, directed by reason—in other words, the truly godly, sober, and righteous life—will be one that is completely and symmetrically developed, with no one interest or function over-emphasized, and none suppressed or slighted.

So far, we have been almost entirely dealing with and stressing a strain in Plato's thought that we may call characteristically naturalistic, pagan, and Hellenic. For the "all round" moral ideal, the ideal of finding the good by opening every possible window on life and allowing its light to shine in through every side of our nature, seems to have been dominant in Hellenic thought and action. Or at least the illusion that it was so has come down to us as one of the most precious of the contributions made by Greece to civilized living. If paganism means anything to us, it means the justification of the natural man and the possession by the good of body, passions, and parts. And the happiness it reveals is the happiness that lurks in any animal's finding itself alive, and that is captured for us by the exercise of all the capacities, physical, emotional, and intellectual, with which the human animal comes endowed. This heritage of sanity and mellowness, of joy in the life of the body and of sensitiveness to beauty in all its forms, this endowment of subtle and keen delight in observing and meditating upon man and the world and of passion for thinking and knowing and running the truth to earth, was bred in Plato's bone and ran without transfusion in his blood. He was, then, prompted by much in his tradition and temperament to view the good as something inclusive, not exclusive, built, not of any one, but of all the materials provided by our organic interests and desires.

Yet there was also much, not only in his particular circumstances but in the spirit of his age, to impel him in the opposite direction towards an ethics anti-worldly in its teachings and aimed at a supernatural goal. Paganism was not altogether whole-heartedly for perfecting the natural man and realizing the good through an organized fulfilment of his whole nature within the limits imposed upon it by the circumstances of finitude and mortality. Greek thought, being after all but

human, was subject to strange hopes and fears, to convictions of sin and sicknesses of the soul, to intimations of immortality and of an unearthly destiny only to be attained by the renunciation of much that the natural man held dear. Mitigated as these symptoms were by the dominant, naturalistic mood, they nevertheless indicated a real troubling of the Greek spirit, which philosophy and religion could not throw off. Of this tendency in religion the great, non-conformist, Orphic movement was the most pronounced expression, with its mystical vision of the soul, divine in substance and origin, held captive by the senses and the body as in a prison or tomb, and at length redeemed from the wheel of birth and rebirth and returned to the Godhead through adherence to the tenets of the way of life imposed by the sect. And the essential Orphic teaching had been taken over by the Pythagoreans, and its dualism had been emphasized by the opposition, metaphysically, of Limit to the Unlimited, and morally, of the soul to the body, as a principle of good to one of evil. Again, Socrates, if we regard him as inspired by the Pythagoreans and credit him as well as Plato with the doctrines we are about to discuss, had been greatly influenced by this dualism. And, even regarded more narrowly and relegated to his traditional place, he had developed a puritanism of sorts, restricting the conditions of happiness to virtue, seeing no good in aesthetic enjoyment, and disparaging the satisfaction taken by the intellect in pure science and philosophical speculation. The Cynics, too, had damned all the pleasures and amenities of existence generally as hindrances to good living, and had developed a narrowly intellectual and arid view of the life of reason.

To these influences as well as to the dominant Hellenic tradition Plato fell heir, and, as we saw in discussing his career, there were sides to his character, religious, mystical, visionary, that in the right circumstances might be turned so as to mirror and reflect them. It needed only a shock, a disillusionment, to convert other-worldliness into anti-worldliness, and this shock was given by the death of Socrates. We shall not be surprised, then, to find a good deal in the Platonic philosophy that seems counter to and is, indeed, inconsistent with the naturalistic



outlook on life we have just been portraying. Thus the Orphic-Pythagorean, and possibly Socratic, doctrine of the origin and destiny of the soul was taken over spirit and letter, with its dualistic implications if anything intensified. The soul is violently contrasted with the body, as the only principle of good with one of unmitigated evil. Man is akin to the divine and falls from heaven; <sup>114</sup> his incarnation is a lapse from perfection and a confession and punishment of sin; <sup>115</sup> he is disfigured, <sup>116</sup> imprisoned, <sup>117</sup> and entombed, <sup>118</sup> as long as he is in the body; his earthly good consists in having as little to do as possible with the flesh in which he finds himself; <sup>119</sup> and the process of salvation lies in a purgatorial cleansing from the defilement suffered here below, and in an eventual escape from all contact with natural life into a supernatural sphere. <sup>120</sup> These views are, of course, difficult to reconcile with the naturalistic doctrine of the soul as tripartite, set forth in the *Republic*, and even with the sense of the myth in the *Phaedrus* that the soul is possessed as naturally of the inclinations that bring her down to earth as of those that raise her to heaven. The results of the inconsistency are to be seen, perhaps, in the tendency in the later dialogues to distinguish two sorts of soul, the rational and immortal on the one hand, the irrational and perishable on the other <sup>121</sup>—a doctrine that at one point leads Plato to speak of an evil world-soul, <sup>122</sup> and to verge on adding a devil of sorts to the world and the flesh.

Teaching like this we should expect to frame at the best a mystical ethics of renunciation, at the worst an arid puritanism, and it cannot be denied that both these tendencies crop up from time to time in Plato. In the *Republic*, for all its eagerness to remould human affairs after an ideal pattern, there come pessimistic moments when the philosopher is told to despair of doing any good deed in so naughty a world as this, and to retire for true fulfilment from all contact with mundane and fleshly things to undisturbed contemplation of the ideal.

<sup>114</sup> *Phaedrus*, 245 C ff.

<sup>115</sup> *Phaedrus*, 248 A ff.

<sup>116</sup> *Republic*, X, 611 C.

<sup>117</sup> *Phaedo*, 62 B.

<sup>118</sup> *Cratylus*, 400 B.

<sup>119</sup> *Phaedo*, 64 D ff. *Theaetetus*, 176 A.

<sup>120</sup> *Phaedo*, 66 C ff., 113 D ff.

<sup>121</sup> *Timaeus*, 69 C ff., 72 D. *Polit.*, 309 C.

<sup>122</sup> *Laws*, XIII, 961 D ff.

In the *Theaetetus*, too, the truly moral life, the life that brings us nearer to God and makes us like him, consists in flying away from the inextinguishable evils of earth and mounting up to heaven as quickly as we can.<sup>123</sup> And the note sounds again and again throughout the Platonic philosophy, as it must in any system pervaded with mysticism.

Moreover, in dealing with earthly things this mysticism is apt to translate itself into an attitude, now of a rather narrow intellectualism, now of puritanism. The life of reason tends to be regarded, not as a subjection of all our interests, including the directive function of thought, to the harmonious working out of an all-inclusive symphony, but rather as a solo performance, played by the only really good instrument in the lot, the accompaniment of which by the others is a sign of necessity rather than of virtue, and must be minimized since it cannot be wholly suppressed. Towards this idea of thought as the exclusive purveyor of happiness, Plato is continually veering. And so far as the "puritan" tendencies are concerned, we are familiar with the diatribe against the arts and its apparent subjection of the aesthetic to the "moral" side of our nature; and in the *Laws* we shall find a kind of religious and moral fanaticism, and a willingness to go to lengths that strike us as unduly harsh in imposing upon the citizenry a godly, sober, and righteous life.

Still, the fact remains that, though this point of view figures prominently in Plato's general attitude towards the world, it never really invades his systematic ethics. Indeed, the inconsistency we have pointed out is not so much a cleavage within his theory of morals, as a failure of his ethics as a whole to accord with other points, both of spirit and letter, in his philosophy. Whenever he deals with morals scientifically rather than emotionally, he develops the broader, naturalistic idea of the good. This is true not only of the theory set forth in the *Republic*, but it also seems to be his last known word on the subject. For, in one of the latest dialogues, the *Philebus*, in which he returns to the subject of Hedonism, and re-weighs the claims of pleasure against those of wisdom or reason, he comes

<sup>123</sup> *Theaetetus*, 176 A ff.

to much the same conclusions as in his earlier work. Since the ethical part of the dialogue is a final résumé of his reflection upon the moral good, we may anticipate his views and purloin them from his later philosophy to serve as a summary of his mature thought.

The conditions that provoked the dialogue may be guessed at. Hedonism was still rampant. The Cyrenaics were not to be downed, and worse still, the philosopher-astronomer Eudoxus, who, we may remember, had been in his youth a pupil of Plato's and later returned to Athens with a band of students of his own, had adopted, apparently from Democritus, the doctrine that the good is pleasure and was teaching it within the walls of the Academy itself. His opinions made considerable stir, and were vigorously combated by Plato's nephew, Speusippus, with the rather extreme thesis that pleasure is actually an evil.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, the claims of wisdom or reason, conceived rather narrowly and intellectually to be the good, were being championed by the Megarics and the Cynics. In these circumstances Plato was apparently moved to enter the lists himself and review the situation.<sup>125</sup>

The *Philebus* begins abruptly and without artistry of *mise-en-scène*, as is characteristic of the later dialogues, and the question whether pleasure, or wisdom, or possibly some third thing is the good is immediately raised. All pleasures, Socrates admits, are pleasurable to be sure, but this does not mean that all pleasures are good.<sup>126</sup> There are differences between pleasures, just as there are differences also in the kinds of wisdom,<sup>127</sup> and it is to these differences that we must look for the distinction between good and evil pleasures. Let us then classify pleasures, and, for that matter, the kinds of wisdom, too. If we do so, our task of comparison will be easier.<sup>128</sup> But first we may agree upon one point. Pleasure without the power of knowing and reflecting upon it would reduce a man's life to the level of an oyster's; and similarly the power to think without the power to enjoy would leave life a

<sup>124</sup> Raeder, *op. cit.*, p. 357; Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

<sup>127</sup> 13 B-14 B.

<sup>125</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

<sup>128</sup> 18 E-19 B.

<sup>126</sup> 12 D-13 B.



dreary affair, not worth living. The good, then, we may say with assurance, will be neither mere pleasure (as the Cyrenaics and Eudoxus maintained) nor mere wisdom or reason (as the Cynics and Megarics taught). It will rather be some degree of mixture of the two.<sup>129</sup> The immediate question at issue becomes whether mind or pleasure is the more important ingredient, and it is to determine this point that our classification will be carried on. For a standard of classification Plato turns to metaphysics. To all things there are four aspects; first, a certain degree of indefiniteness, or moreness and lessness; second, a limited and definite character; third, the mixture of definiteness and indefiniteness, of rigid form and sense appearance, that makes up each concrete, particular object; and finally, some cause or reason that effects the mixture.<sup>130</sup> Now, obviously pleasure, which, like pain, admits of more and less, and which would have to be unlimited in quantity and degree to be wholly satisfactory, is indefinite and fluid in character, and belongs in the first class. As obviously, the good life, being a mixture of pleasure and wisdom, belongs to the third class. To the fourth we must assign our mind or reason, which determines the proper mixture of pleasure and wisdom in us, and is part of the larger world-mind that brings fluid matter and definite form together and combines them in an orderly universe.<sup>131</sup>

The second class Socrates leaves for the moment unfilled, and turns immediately to consider pleasure in further detail. His argument is largely a reiteration of that in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, and we need not go into it at length. He amplifies somewhat the psychology of pleasure set forth in the *Republic*, correlating pleasure and pain with motions tending to disturb or restore the harmony of the body and violent enough to reach the soul. And he adds that the native impulse of the body becomes conscious desire, which, reinforced by experience and memory, give birth to images and anticipations of pleasure.<sup>132</sup> Backed by this psychology, he makes once more a point with which we are already familiar, that these images

<sup>129</sup> 21 A–22 B.<sup>130</sup> 23 B–27 D.<sup>131</sup> 27 D–31 A.<sup>132</sup> 31 B–35 D.

and opinions are often false, and that the pleasures arising from them stultify themselves and cannot, for all their pleasurable-ness, be regarded as true and good pleasures.<sup>133</sup> Also, he returns again to intensity or quantity as a criterion of goodness, showing that it will not work, since the pleasures of a morbid are often more intense than those of a healthy condition, witness the delight of a feverish person in drinking. Moreover, they are inextricably mixed with want and pain, as in our old example of itching and scratching and, for that matter, as in many of the most intense emotions like anger, desire, sorrow, fear, love, and the like. In a word, only the pleasures that are unadulterated and pure and that accompany reasonable and right opinions and anticipations can be considered wholly good.<sup>134</sup> Hence "he who would make us believe pleasure to be a good is involved in great absurdities." Indeed, such a man, arguing that the seat of pleasure is the soul, would have us believe that the characteristic virtues of the soul are not really good, or that the good man is bad when suffering, the bad man good when enjoying.<sup>135</sup>

Having disposed of the defenders of pleasure as the good, Plato turns his attention to the claims of wisdom. Knowledge cannot be used as a blanket term. It, too, has degrees of accuracy, of more and less. The sciences, for example, lack exactness in proportion as they are not mathematical, and some sorts of mathematics are purer than others. Of the purity of dialectic, or the contemplation of eternal, unchangeable, and unmixed Reality, there can, however, be no doubt. If, then, we are to maintain that wisdom is the good, we must confine ourselves to pure wisdom.<sup>136</sup>

Plato is at last in a position to describe the composition of the good life. It will be a life that includes both pleasure and knowledge. Of that we are agreed at the start, for neither the one nor the other is self-sufficient. The pure pleasures and pure sciences will take their places there as a matter of course. However, being in the world and the body, we cannot do without the applied and less exact sciences, and also with-

<sup>133</sup> 44 D-55 A.

<sup>134</sup> 35 D-44 D.

<sup>135</sup> 44 D-55 B.

<sup>136</sup> 55 B-59 E.

out the necessary pleasures that accompany healthy physical functioning. But to combine all these so as to procure the best and happiest life, we must have an ideal of symmetry and measure, or, as we might say in the words of the *Republic*, of harmony. Symmetry and measure are beautiful and also akin to truth—so that the mixture of sciences and pleasures they suggest will constitute a true and beautiful life.

We can now arrange in the order of their importance the various elements that make a moral order possible and enter into the moral life. In the first place, there must be really such a thing as symmetry—an eternal Form or Nature of symmetry in general—for otherwise concrete things or particular lives would be without even the appearance of measure and harmony. Next, comes that modicum of individual symmetry which comes from modelling oneself upon such an ideal. Third, there is reason or wisdom, which, rather than pleasure, is plainly the instrument for grasping truth, measure, and real beauty and for incorporating them in the individual's career. Then come the arts, the true opinions, and the various branches of knowledge, whose possession and exercise do the practical work of ordering our lives wisely and well. And finally we have the pure pleasures that "accompany, some the sciences, some the senses."<sup>137</sup>

Such is the judgment passed by Plato upon the dispute in his own school between Eudoxus and Speusippus, and, outside of it, between the Cynics and the Cyrenaics. It is the product of his later years, and the opinion it expresses is the last word we have of his on ethics scientifically considered. We find there little trace of dualism or one-sidedness of any sort. There is no asceticism, no uncompromising opposition of the soul to the body, no puritanical suspicion of enjoyment in general, no tendency to construe the life of reason narrowly as a life of thought to the exclusion of the rest of our nature. Indeed, Plato seems to be as suspicious of an arid, over-intellectual view of the good life as he is of the lushness of Hedonism. He is pushing home with more dryness, concision, and scientific analysis the points made in the *Republic* that human nature is

<sup>137</sup> 60 A-67 B.



not simple but complex, and that justice and happiness lie in the pulling together and harmonious teamwork of all its parts, not in the suppression of one part by another.

Still, and here our hesitancy perhaps reflects Plato's own mind in the matter, we should not underestimate the influence of the dualistic, the ascetic, and the mystical influences upon his general view of the moral life. We are probably safest in arriving at no conclusion and in not trying to weld elements that will not fuse. We can only say that Plato seems to have been swayed now in one direction now in another by two antagonistic forces. On the one hand, there was the characteristically Hellenic, pagan impulse to build a sovereign good out of the possibilities and the splendors of body and mind, sense, emotion, and thought, with which nature has endowed the human animal. On the other, there was the mystical impulse to find none of the natural goods satisfactory or realizable, to seek true happiness and salvation by flying away from earth and the natural man to some purer and higher, supernatural sphere, and to fledge ourselves for the flight by an austere rule of life as far withdrawn as possible from contact with the world of sense and material accomplishment. The mixture of two such motives cannot but be somewhat cloudy.

We shall not try to decide a state of mind in itself probably undecided. As it is, certain all-important points for our discussion stand out clearly and distinctly. In the first place an analysis of the moral situation, like an analysis of love, leads us irresistibly to the conclusion that besides the flux of becoming there exists a realm of universal types and laws good for all times and places. Wherever there is a moral order of any sort, wherever the terms justice and righteousness have any meaning, the essence of that order and the definition of those terms are the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever. Harmony, measure, symmetry, turn out to be always and everywhere true descriptions of the goal that it is the real purpose of all moral life, however primitive and groping, to attain. There must, then, exist an abstract and eternal Form or Idea of the moral good to explain the existence and nature of moral conduct, just as there must be an abstract and eternal Essence of

beauty to explain the existence and the aim of love. Clear-sighted conduct, in a word, no less than clear-sighted love, redeems man from the flux, sets his feet upon the sure ground of the Real, and gives to his life the value of eternity.

It follows that Plato's ethics, even in its most naturalistic and healthily pagan moments, is always bound up with metaphysics and has a supernatural, or at any rate a super-terrestrial, basis and sanction. Whatever the formula of the moral good may be—whether it includes or excludes the world and the flesh, and describes man's physical nature and earthly interests as the enemy or the ally of a complete moral fruition of his life—that formula is in any case let down from the heaven of the Ideas and is apprehended directly by the inner eye of the soul. It is not provisional, relative, and flexible, rinsed clear of metaphysical starch, as later Aristotle was to develop it. The proportion in which the ingredients of the good life must be mixed is a fixed quantity as deeply and directly inherent in the nature of Reality as the properties of the circle or the triangle, and it has all the authority and the rigidity of a truth once and for all delivered unto all mankind. We must not then be deceived by the naturalistic and "scientific" phases of the Platonic ethics into supposing that the system had a naturalistic and empirical basis. Plato, to be sure, in contrasting practical to pure knowledge makes something very like our modern distinction between the so-called "empirical" sciences with their approximate, descriptive laws and the exact sciences with their necessary, prescriptive ones.<sup>138</sup> But the only sciences that count for him are the exact sciences, the only laws worthy of the name are the Forms of true being. And here, in his opinion, the science and the laws of human conduct belong beyond doubt.

Furthermore, Plato seems to have seen that the measure of the exactness of a science is the possibility of expressing in mathematical formulae the laws it discovers. In dealing with the *Republic* we had occasion to note the early growth of

<sup>138</sup> *Philebus*, 55 C–59 D. I dodge here, of course, the modern question whether even the laws of mathematics can be called necessary, and whether all science is not empirical and approximative only.

Plato's interest in mathematics. Indeed, we saw him in that dialogue already insisting upon a thorough study of the subject as an indispensable preparation for rising to the vision of the Ideas and of the Good. Now we find that this interest has become a veritable passion and the source of a great hope. Just as the vistas opened by the mathematical revival of a later day spurred on Descartes and Spinoza to attempt a sort of geometry of metaphysics, so Plato was bitten by the idea that the method of mathematics might be universally applied. For that matter, as we shall soon see when we come to the metaphysical implications of the *Philebus*, it looks as if he were beginning to voice articulately the feeling that the Forms themselves, so far as they satisfy the desire to know, must be regarded as essentially mathematical formulae. That point must wait till later, concerned as we are at present only with the moral aspect of the dialogue. Suffice it to say for the moment that Plato is seeking what we should call a "scientific" ethics, or in other words the exact determination and statement of a rule of right behavior and of a recipe of happiness "good" for all individuals and states. In the *Republic* he had defined justice as a *harmonious* working together of the different parts of the soul, and let it go at that. Now he is trying to find a formula to tell us once and for all what that harmony is. And this he is doing by the use of the mathematical method. "Limit," as one critic has said, "means specifically determined mathematical ratio."<sup>139</sup> Applied to the springs and ingredients of human conduct, it should yield, Plato feels, the exact fractions to be assigned to the various factors in the sum of the total moral good, and should enable us to conceive harmony and justice as an arithmetical proportion. In a word, inspired by his growing confidence in mathematics to solve all problems, he is trying to recast his ethics *more geometrico*—in geometrical form.<sup>140</sup>

We may note also, at the risk again of forestalling a point that will arise later, that in a contemporay dialogue, the *Statesman*, Plato applies the mathematical doctrine of measure to politics. There he maintains that the "excellence or beauty

<sup>139</sup> Taylor, *Plato*, p. 417.

<sup>140</sup> Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, p. 87; cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 94.



of every work of art is due to the observance of measure,"<sup>141</sup> and that a really scientific form of government, such as could be instituted by an all-wise king, would entail an accurate balancing of different temperaments and an interweaving of anti-thetic virtues in due proportion.<sup>142</sup>

Further discussion of the increasingly grave and acute mathematical accent in Plato's thought we must leave to a future chapter. But we shall find predictions of it also in his treatment of knowledge, to which we are about to turn. And by having made this excursion into the future in ethics and politics we shall perhaps be able to deal more intelligently with the Platonic epistemology.

That we can no longer avoid or postpone a discussion of this rather difficult field must be obvious. We approach it, indeed, under a double compulsion. In analyzing love we were continually forced to borrow terms from the sphere of reasoning and knowing, and upon the place occupied in Plato's ethics by thought and wisdom we have no need to dwell. The basis of right action for him, as for Socrates, is knowledge of the good. And he feels that he has gone beyond his master by discovering through the use of reason and logic what that good is. Moreover, he could scarcely attempt to apply the mathematical and scientific method in the ethical sphere without having first studied its bases and nature. We, however, have been so far accepting without much question the activities of thought and reason, and words like "truth." We can do so no longer. We must find out what they are like, and what is the mark of this "truth" of which they profess themselves to be ever in search. Let us apply ourselves, then, to the question—what is knowledge?

<sup>141</sup> *Statesman*, 284 A.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Robin, *La Pensée Grecque*, pp. 263 ff.

## CHAPTER VII

### PLATO'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

#### I

As we have seen, the equivocal and intriguing glances cast by the passing show of events upon their audience as they troop down the stage have an appeal other than that of beauty or of virtue. There is a "come hither" look in the eyes of the most respectable and the homeliest datum of sense, and on the face of all of them there plays a Gioconda-like smile which suggests that they are at the same time more than they seem and not all they ought to be. It is in this enigmatic look which fires the primitive wonder and curiosity about the world that the process of knowledge begins. We find ourselves at the same instant both perceiving sense-data and instinctively interpreting what we perceive.

Now many people, Plato feels, do not get very far with their interpretation. Their perceptions look to them, indeed, as if they came from the outside and were somehow fairly reliable pictures of a world of external objects. But the line between fact and fancy is vaguely drawn. Images are frequently confused with their originals and dreams mistaken for realities. We cherish illusions and are taken in by misrepresentations. We shy at shadows and growl at reflections in a mirror or stream. In a word, many of us dwell in a state of semi-bewilderment, or as Plato calls it, of vain imaginings and random guesses.

There are, however, harder heads who are not so gullible. Such people know when they are caught napping and when they are awake, and can tell a dream or a fancy from a so-called fact. And they are able to discount what is told them in the light of what they perceive with their own eyes. Seeing with

them is believing. Their world, then, is a reasonably cold and objective affair. It goes on of itself out there, a troop of independent, external things, animate and inanimate, quite oblivious to our gossip and prejudice and illusion, and only the impressions that bear its label are regarded as trustworthy. This more robust and better instructed type of experience, with its clearer distinction between the subjective and the objective, exhibits, to use a Platonic term, assurance rather than bewilderment in dealing with its data. Its grasp on things is more certain, its manner more convinced. It has developed a kind of *savoir faire*, and its thoughts and acts are not without a certain worldly wisdom.

Still, this state of mind is far from being true knowledge. For, even when we have distinguished the data that mean an external world from those that do not, we have by no means obtained a handhold on anything that, on second thought, we can call Reality. Facts, we soon discover, are as many, as various, as conflicting, as shifting and passing, as fancies. We are, perhaps, no longer being rolled over and over in a Protagorean stream of purely subjective sensation which seems true one moment and false the next. But the objective world on which we now think we have a grasp turns out to be little better. It, too, is an unmitigated Heracleitean flux, lawless, unstable, and unreliable, and its motley flotsam and jetsam of events and objects have no coherence and order of their own. And the distinction between truth and error, fact and fancy, acquired through empirical—and bitter—experience, which enables us to keep our heads above water and swim with some success, is after all derived from mere provisional and half-baked rules of thumb. At this stage in the game we are like the lover whose eye is caught by the beauty of this or that, but lacks perception as yet of the single nature and principle of beauty that makes his various loves attractive.<sup>1</sup> Or, to concoct a modern illustration of our own, we may suppose ourselves threading a precarious way through crowded city streets full of darting taxi-cabs and flanked by buildings under rapid and careless construction. We have learned by observation and accident

<sup>1</sup> *Rep.*, V, 479 E.



the objectivity and the danger of speeding cabs and falling bricks, and have worked out rough and ready means for dodging them that assure us fairly well against mishap and enable us to go about our business with confidence. But we are still ignorant of the physical laws governing the behavior of moving bodies—as for example, gravitation, acceleration, the equality of action and reaction and of the angles of incidence and reflection—which make our rules of thumb effective and justify our assurance.

At the same time, this state of mind cannot be dismissed as ignorance pure and simple. Even random guesswork and the muddling of fact and fancy can scarcely be called that. For unadulterated ignorance would be a sheer mental blankness without the faintest glimmer of knowledge in it, too vacuous even to perplex or to confuse us. We cannot speak of it as having, like knowledge, an object, since it is wholly negative, but we might say that it has a kind of counterpart and pseudo-object in “not-being.” By this, however, we do not mean that the absolutely ignorant person—if such could be found—would be unconscious. Appearances would still swarm before his eyes, but they would be wholly meaningless to him. They would give no hint of an objective world, and would arouse no suspicion of a reality behind phenomena. Neither would they carry any suggestion of ideas or general concepts, or afford any ground for inference. For that matter, they could never clot together into “things” and make names for themselves, since “things” and names are the beginning of wisdom. And terms like “being” and “existence,” which are also rather sophisticated, could not be applied to them. Literally, then, to the completely ignorant man the flux of sensation would look like no thing and no being,—in other words would be, as Plato says, “not-being.”<sup>2</sup> The wildest guess, however, is about something. It is more than the appearance that excites it. It is a meaning that the appearance possesses, and is an inference of sorts. It is aimed at “being,” and, though it may fly wide of its particular mark, its general direction is towards truth. And the most hopeless muddling of fact and fancy implies that

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 477 A.

a distinction between appearance and reality, no matter how crude and ill-drawn, has suggested itself to the mind.

These two stages, of guesswork and the greater assurance of rule of thumb, which are a mixture of ignorance and knowledge and lie intermediate between them, Plato calls *opinion*.<sup>3</sup> The object of opinion is correspondingly a mixture of "being" and "not-being" and hovers midway between them. It is a world composed of appearances partially rationalized but as yet incompletely understood—in other words, the familiar work-a-day, material world in space and time, in which all sorts of things are continually passing into and out of existence, or in the Platonic phrase "becoming." In it universal and permanent natures and types and laws are seen intermittently and confusedly through a medium of change and multiplicity. Nothing is absolute and clear-cut in the picture; everything is relative and shifting. One and the same form is reproduced again and again with wearisome reiteration in a host of imperfect examples. And in one and the same concrete thing a host of forms overlap and supplant one another. What looks beautiful one moment looks ugly the next. What seems just to you seems unjust to me. What appears light or small relatively to one thing looms large and heavy in relation to another.<sup>4</sup> We are still, then, in the Sophists' quandary. We can say of our world "it seems," "it looks as if," "it is my opinion that," but we cannot say as yet "it is," "I know."

It is impossible, however, for a thinking man to remain complacent in this quandary for long. Willy-nilly, he is forced sooner or later to find reasons for his opinions, no matter how well borne out by common experience and consent they may be. It is a sound and practical opinion, for example, that bricks fall straight down. But we have now also to ask ourselves, or are asked by others, why they fall rather than remain suspended in the air, and fall as they do instead of obliquely or in spirals. Or again, we can do sums in addition quite correctly on our fingers and measure off and lay out a plot of ground with a knotted string. But, at the same time, we are led to wonder about the nature and relations of num-

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 478-479.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

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bers and geometrical figures which render our rough methods feasible and our results tolerably accurate. That is, we begin to *think through* the situation—as Newton did, for instance, when he saw the apple falling—and to see the abstract properties of mathematical entities and the general principles that underlie the behavior of all moving bodies. Or, we might say, we are now getting at the rational form and structure of the phenomenal world and reaching an *intelligent understanding*, as Plato calls it, of the why and wherefore of things.

But the edifice of knowledge still lacks its coping. The method of the arithmetician and the geometer, which for Plato is the supreme example of *understanding*, falls short in two respects. In the first place it has not altogether dispensed with sense and imagery, for it still employs formulae, equations, and diagrams in setting forth its theories and demonstrations. The mathematician uses them, to be sure, as mere symbols and aids, and sees through them clearly enough to the abstract mathematical truths which are the real objects of his thought. But at the same time he leaves standing at the level of sense such characteristics of his figures as do not bear directly upon the subject at hand. From the white lines, for instance, that he draws upon the blackboard he does not bother to deduce the universal forms of whiteness, and length, and breadth, and chalk, and the like, but only the abstract nature of triangularity. And by leaving these other qualities unreduced to their proper types and allowing them still to appear to the eye rather than to the mind, he introduces a pictorial element into his demonstration. In other words, he is not yet grasping mathematical truths in complete abstraction from sense-data. He is seeing the image of a particular triangle at the same time that he is thinking of the universal properties of triangles in general. Again, to choose an example of our own, the biologist, in using the guinea-pig to exemplify the Mendelian law of heredity, does not refer all its characteristics to the types and laws of which they are instances, and analyze the entire animal into a system of interrelated concepts—of blackness and whiteness and hair and bone and blood and the like. He simply abstracts such aspects as illustrate the truth in



question, and leaves the rest of it a particular object running about squealing in the world of phenomena. His scientific interest, like that of the mathematician in the figure of the triangle, is not all-inclusive and all-dissolving. To put it in more general terms, the sciences are selective. None of them ever takes a universal point of view and tries to relate its particular field to the fields of the other sciences and to Reality as a whole. Hence each ignores many aspects of the universe, which remains, so far as it is concerned, an unresolved and indigested mass of sense-data.

In the second place, the sciences do not any of them, in Plato's opinion, ever really get down to bed-rock. The starting-points they select are not first principles but derivative concepts. For instance, the geometer assumes the ultimate character of the axioms and postulates upon which he bases his theorems, and the astronomer in developing his celestial mechanics does not seek to go behind the presence of heavenly bodies moving in space. Or, to choose more modern examples, the biologist regards life, and the psychologist has until recently looked upon consciousness, as an irreducible fact so far as the purposes of his science are concerned. But these starting-points are by no means final concepts; witness the development of non-Euclidian geometry and the Einstein theory, and the contentions that consciousness and life are modes of mechanical energy, or conversely that the whole physical and mechanical world, even down to protons and electrons, may be reduced to terms of consciousness pure and simple and regarded as existing only in and for a mind. In short, we find that the sciences are all accepting as first principles postulates that are really open questions, and are constructing their hypotheses upon grounds that are themselves a secondary and shaky stratum of Reality.

If, then, the desire to know the whole truth about things is to be fulfilled and knowledge is to attain its goal, both these shortcomings of understanding must be supplemented and rectified. No sensible qualities in the particular object can be passed over and left standing. Every concrete object has to be rendered intelligible through and through by being un-

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ravelled into the various abstract forms and natures that lie snarled and knotted there. The guinea-pig must be resolved into all the general types and laws of animal psychology, organic structure, bio-chemistry, matter and motion, and the like, that feature in it. And the triangle on the blackboard must follow suit. Every minutest item and shyest aspect in them, and in every other incident in the flux of sense, must become so transparent that the eye of reason sees through them, undistracted by speck or flaw, to the universal principles that underlie phenomena. And then the mind's eye must strain further and further back through these principles themselves, seeing in them instances of more inclusive types and laws and grouping them under ever wider and deeper generalizations, until finally it reaches some all-comprehensive and all-explaining first principle from which the whole system may be logically deduced.<sup>5</sup> In short, we must now *reason* out by the exercise of pure logic a *philosophic* theory of the nature of Reality as a whole that will unify and systematize the premises and concepts of the sciences, in the same way that scientific hypotheses organize and explain their appropriate sense-data. This purely logical power of the mind, by the exercise of which it soars from the axioms and the results of the sciences "to the first principle of the whole; and then clinging to this and to that which depends on this, by successive steps . . . descends again without the aid of any sensible object from ideas, through ideas, and ends in ideas,"<sup>6</sup> is called by Plato *dialectic*.<sup>7</sup>

To illustrate this gradual and continuous ascent from complete ignorance towards perfect knowledge<sup>8</sup> Plato uses two figures, the simile of the divided line and the allegory of the prisoners in the cave. Take, he says in the first figure, a line and cut it in two, and then subdivide in like manner both of the resulting sections, making four divisions in all. The two main sections represent respectively the visible and the intelligible, the data of sense and the objects of thought. The

<sup>5</sup> *Rep.*, VII, 531 D.

<sup>6</sup> *Rep.*, VI, 511 B.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 511 B. Cf. *Rep.* VII, 31 D ff. For a discussion of the four stages of development, cf. Nettleship, *op. cit.*, ch. XI.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Nettleship, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

first subdivision of the section of the visible stands for the images, shadows, and reflections that come to us helter-skelter through our senses and make up our perceptual experiences. The other segment symbolizes the objective, outer world, of which we soon come to regard our perceptions as copies or resemblances. Passing now to the intelligible world, we find that the first subdivision there stands for the forms and laws discovered in phenomena by the sciences, but not yet completely reduced to a single first principle or wholly divested of the images of the things to which they apply. And the other subdivision represents the whole world of Forms interrelated in a single system and subsumed under a single all-comprehensive and all-explaining Idea.<sup>9</sup> Corresponding to these four divisions are the four faculties of the soul with which we have just been dealing—imaginings and guesses, assurance and *savoir faire*, understanding, and pure reason, which form an ascending series in mental clearness in the same degree that their objects have truth.<sup>10</sup>

Or again, let us suppose prisoners chained in an underground den, unable to turn their heads.<sup>11</sup> Behind them a great fire blazes in the distance, and between them and it there is a low raised walk along which porters are forever carrying all sorts of figures and images of the animals existing on the surface of the earth. All that the prisoners can see are the reflections cast upon the wall in front of them by the images, and the conversation of the porters comes to them in echo as if it were the talk of the passing shadows. To them then all truth and reality would be nothing but the shadow of an image. Now turn the prisoners round and what will happen? They will be dazzled by the glare of the fire, and for a time they will be unable to see the figures that have been casting the shadows. And when they do, it will be hard work to convince them that these figures are more true and real than the shadows, and that the sights to which they have been accustomed, and to whose dark sil-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 508 D ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Rep.*, VII, 511 D ff. I have here followed Nettleship's interpretation of the "divided line." His view, however, is questioned by Stocks (*Classical Quarterly*, V (1911), pp. 73 ff.) and Ferguson (*ibid.*, XV, 1921).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 514 A ff.



houettes the half-blinded eye turns back for rest and relief, are mere illusions. How much more dazzled, then, and pained a prisoner will be, if he is dragged up to the outer world and confronted with the real objects of which the images are copies, and is forced even to lift his eyes towards the sun whose light reveals the nature of these objects, their relations to one another, and their proper place in the world. A long habituation and training will be necessary. At first he will see shadows, then reflections, then the objects themselves, then the heavens by starlight and moonlight, until finally he can bear the radiance of the sun. The traditional application of the allegory is as follows. We are the prisoners, the cave is the visible world, the images are material objects, the fire is the physical sun whose light enables them to appear and us to see. The upper world with its "real" objects is the intelligible realm; the originals of the images are the Forms or Ideas. And the sun corresponds to that first and final principle, "The universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in the visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual,"<sup>12</sup> whose existence has been already implied by the insufficiency of *understanding* and by the need of supplementing and capping the sciences with dialectic or philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

This principle, which forms the culminating peak of the Platonic system, we are now in a position to scale. We may approach it from the side both of the Ideas and of our reasoning process. Let us start from the Ideas. Particular objects, as we have seen, get a nature and a name and become describable things by virtue of displaying a type or law of some sort and having a definite Form. The indefinite expanse, then, of sensible particulars converges upon a higher range of general concepts which cast their shadows upon every individual detail. But now, arguing by analogy, we might expect these general concepts in their turn to converge upon some central Idea which transcends and overshadows them all, just as each Form

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 517 C.

<sup>13</sup> For another interpretation of the allegory of the Cave, cf. Ferguson, *Classical Quarterly*, XVI, 1922.

transcends the mass of phenomena that embody it. In other words, just as all individual men, however unlike, are examples of human nature, so all Forms, however different, exemplify the nature of Form in general.

Furthermore, we shall find the nature of Forms, as we find the nature of any class, by discovering their common characteristic. The Forms, we see, for all their variety, are at one in the identical work they do of unifying, defining, and making coherent and comprehensible the phenomena to which they apply. All of them satisfy the desire to know, are principles of explanation and termini of thought, and bear the stamp and value of truth. To be a Form is to explain, to make clear, to hold good for things, to validate reasoning. The quality, then, common to all the Ideas we may sum up as satisfactoriness or goodness for thought, or in other words, as *intelligibility*. Hence it seems quite *à propos* that this principle of intelligibility which is the supreme object of knowledge, and which gives essence and being to all the Forms, even as each Form gives essence and being to a class of particular objects,<sup>14</sup> should be called by Plato the Idea or Form of the Good.

Further light is shed upon the nature of this principle if we approach it through the aspirations of reason. What is it, we may ask, that proves wholly good and satisfactory to thought and in which reason comes to rest? The answer is:—the complete coherency and unity of their object. Reasoning, as Plato points out, declines to be brought to an end until the Forms, with which the many, one-sided sciences content themselves and stop, have been dovetailed like the parts of a picture puzzle and combined in a single connected system—a Form or plan of the universe as a whole. And it is just the fact of the Forms looking as if they could be fitted into one another and belonged to one and the same picture that gives them their goodness for thought and their truth-value. Isolated and unrelated, they would derail thinking and bring the scientists to a full stop—the chemist in his particular laws and concepts, the physicist in his, the psychologist in his—with no hope of prolonging the line and proceeding to the same ultimate des-

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Robin, *La Pensée Grecque*, p. 232.

tionation. If, for instance, the law of gravitation could not be brought into accord with the other laws of motion, it would set rather than solve a problem, and block rather than aid our attempt to comprehend the behavior of moving bodies. Or again, no matter how well the concepts of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, ethics, and the like may work in their respective fields, we remain suspicious of them and feel that there is a screw loose somewhere, unless they can be geared together. In a word, if the Forms are to be really intelligible, they must, in Plato's eyes, intercommunicate, and the understanding of one section of the universe must help unlock the door to the understanding of another, till all are eventually thrown into one. Otherwise, as a litter of fragmentary and incongruous items of knowledge about the world, of which we can never even hope to make head or tail, they simply put a final stamp of irrationality upon the universe and proclaim it an unintelligible jumble.

The Idea of the Good, then, whatever else it may be to Plato, emphasizes and gives substance to the fact that the types and laws exhibited in experience are features of a larger all-comprehensive unit, which we may call the Nature or Form of Reality as a whole. It is only, Plato feels, in the light of such a unity that the Ideas can appear as principles of explanation, mean truth to us, and render things intelligible. Moreover, since a type that will not apply or a law that will not hold is good for nothing and equivalent to nothing and not really a type or law at all, we may say that without this unity the Forms cannot even be said to exist. And finally, since the terms "truth" and "existence" denote a complex system of many types and laws, they are not perhaps terms to be used of that essential *oneness*, abstracted from the things it unites, which is the source of the intelligibility of the concepts of the special sciences. It may be that the principle of unity in the world of Forms would be better described as above or beyond truth and existence. For the Form of Reality as a whole must transcend all real beings in the same way, for example, that the Form of man transcends all human beings.

With so much in mind we may the more readily understand a magnificent passage in the sixth book of the *Republic* in which



Plato develops at some length the analogy between the place and function of the sun in the visible world and the position of the Idea of the Good in the intelligible order. Just as the eye must have light in order to see the objects in the visible world, so the Forms, he tells us, must receive a kind of intelligible illumination in order to be grasped by the soul. In the visible world it is the sun that is the author at once of sight in the eye and of visibility in the physical object. In like manner, in the intelligible sphere it is the Idea of the Good that imparts intelligibility and "truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower." Again, just as the sun is neither the eye nor the visible object, but is higher than both, so the Form of the Good is neither knowledge nor truth, but is superior to either of them. "As . . . light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun, and yet not to be the sun, so in this other sphere science and truth may be deemed to be like the good, but not the good; the good has a place of honor yet higher." Finally, just as the sun on high is the author not only of visibility but of life and growth in the material world, so the Idea of the Good is the author not only of the knowableness but also of the very being and essence of the Forms, although itself is not essence, but is far beyond essence in dignity and power.<sup>15</sup>

In describing the final effort of philosophy by which the mind faces with unblinking eye the sun of the Good and beholds the underlying unity of all Forms and types and laws, Plato turns mystical. Dialectic is, he seems to feel, a counsel of perfection, something beyond the power of our finite minds, at any rate so long as they are imprisoned in the body.<sup>16</sup> If we were capable of it, perfect and absolute knowledge would be here and now within the grasp of man—which it is not. We can never render the veil of sense absolutely transparent and see the truth stark naked and with the mind's eye alone. Nor can we ever completely organize the assumptions and results of the different sciences into a single intelligible scheme and achieve a philosophic system that reduces all the different aspects of the truth to unity. Moreover, the vision of all time

<sup>15</sup> *Rep.*, VI, 527 A-509 D. Cf. on these passages Ferguson, *loc. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Nettleship, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

and existence reduced to pure and perfect unity is something that seems to transcend for him even the highest flights of abstract reason. It is attained, rather, in a kind of mystical intuition, and it is attended by an ineffable ecstasy like that in which love yields itself up and loses itself in the great sea of absolute beauty. And the attainment and enjoyment of it involve a change of experience and attitude akin to that of a religious conversion. The prisoner in the cave could only turn his eye to the light if his whole body were turned around. "So, too, it is only by a movement of the whole soul that the instrument of knowledge can be turned from the world of becoming to that of being, or in other words, of the soul."<sup>17</sup> In short, we are apparently dealing with a kind of Beatific Vision, the equivalent of the religious mystic's vision of God.<sup>18</sup>

Still, this final act of perfect knowledge or intuition in which the mind, turning its attention from the world of sense and beginning, as it were, a new life, contemplates the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and unites itself with the very Form of the universe, is, whether or not it is attainable, the goal after which all thought really yearns and strives, and, falling short of which, feels itself balked and unfulfilled. In other words, like love and right conduct, knowledge is aimed at the eternal, and only in reaching the eternal can it find its "other half," its satisfaction, and its peace. Like them, too, it rescues the soul from the flux and makes her immortal in the deepest sense of the word, adjusting point by point the focus of her attention upon a timeless object, rendering her progressively oblivious to the roar and rush of change and becoming which surround and shake her bodily habitation, and infusing her experience with the quality of eternity. We may say, of knowledge, as of love and moral goodness, that it is the intimation of a changeless and immaterial Reality upon the existence of which its validity depends. If there is no such being, and the flux is all there is, then the message is meaningless, the desire to know which drives men on is a vain desire, and the labors to which the love of truth incites are labors lost.

<sup>17</sup> *Rep.*, VII, 518 C. Jowett's trans. adapted.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon*, I, p. 421 *et seq.*

The Platonic theory of knowledge, then, confirms the message of the Platonic ethics, and taken together they enable us at last to understand the full significance of the situation that confronted us at the very beginning of the chapter. There, we may remember, when we stood looking down at the stream of time and change we noted that the surface of the flux was everywhere broken by unshifting and persistent eddies which deflected its swift, oily current and twisted every drop of its formless substance into exhibition of a form and obedience to a law. Those eddies have now grown into waterspouts everywhere whirling upwards to unite with tremendous shapes of overhanging cloud. For, the particles that become individual things and members of a class of some sort when they begin to swirl about this or that point of arrest in the current, are not wholly immersed in time and change and do not remain wholly upon its level. They are caught upwards into another world. Or rather they are a fusion of the two worlds of being and becoming, to use the Platonic phrase, and in each one of them, however humble, an aspiration of the temporal towards the eternal is met by a condescension of the eternal to the temporal. And they are held and steadied in their momentary outreaching and uprightness, not by any rigidity in their base, but rather by a suction, as it were, from above. The great mass of things are sustained in the waterspout but an instant, and most particular objects, relinquishing their contact with Form, sink back and are dissolved in the waters of the flux. But it is the privilege and dignity of a thing like man, endowed with soul and reason, and conscious of his nature, to suck the liquid stuff of sensuous experience up into the clouds forever and assimilate it to their ethereal shapes and essence. Lifting our hearts and minds out of the bewildering gyrations of the body and the senses, and being caught up and sustained by the love and knowledge of true being, we may retain our contact with the heavens—so that when the body and the senses are reclaimed by the flux, we may still, if only our absorption in truth and beauty and virtue has been sufficiently complete, be gathered up altogether from time and change and depend from the eternal.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PLATONIC IDEAS

#### I

WE are now convinced that the flux of sense and matter in time and space is not all that exists—nay, that it is but a minor aspect of Reality. Its seeming solidity proves so thin and translucent that, whenever we approach it, we always see through it to a realm of fixed, immaterial Forms—qualities, values, types, laws and the like, whose persistent outlines give it all the stability and pattern and meaning it possesses. The characteristic features of these haunting presences we have probably already pieced together. We have doubtless recognized in them our old friends the Socratic general concepts—the universally agreed upon definitions extracted by reiterated question and answer from the conflicting opinions of the multitude. But whereas the Socratic definitions—unless, indeed, we are to credit Socrates with the Platonic theory of Forms—were merely the ideas people had in mind, and what people really meant, when they talked of this, that, or the other, the Platonic Forms were these ideas turned into eternal truths existing independently of the mind. For example, from a comparison of many instances of moving and falling bodies we may sift out a formula that covers every case and arrive at a Socratic general concept. And then we may come to feel that this formula is an objective law that would hold good, would be true, would exist, even if there had never been any minds to discover and entertain it. And even if there were no bodies to enact it, we might still hold that it would exist as a possible or even necessary way in which any physical universe might or must behave, if one ever came into existence. In that case we should have passed from the law of gravitation regarded as a

mere Socratic description or definition to the law regarded as a Platonic Form or Idea.

Again the rigidity and precision of these Forms or Natures of things gives them a mathematical austerity, and we might see in them versions, expanded and extended into the field of logic, of the Numbers of which the Pythagoreans thought that all things were composed—especially when we remember that the Pythagorean numbers were conceived not arithmetically but geometrically, as configurations or patterns of the things in question. And we cannot but be reminded, also, of the Heracleitean Logos, or eternal order inherent in the flux, which in the Ideas we find given greater specification and plotted out into a community of interrelated essences. Finally each Form is itself and no other, and is therefore simple and uncompounded. No beginning or end can be ascribed to it, since it would be as foolish to ask when the gravitational formula became a possible description of the movement of bodies, or when the equality of the interior angles to two right angles began to exist, as it would be to ask when being began to be. And this absolute, unalterable, timeless character of the Forms repeats many of the features of the Parmenidean One and of the Eleatic-Megaric Being.

All these strains are blended in Plato's own description of the Ideas, which we will now sum up. The Forms are, we are told, eternal. They are not rusted or worn away by the processes of change which wreak such havoc in particular concrete objects.<sup>1</sup> They are free from any taint of sense or imagery,<sup>2</sup> invisible to the eye, apprehended only by the mind.<sup>3</sup> They are universal, valid always and everywhere.<sup>4</sup> They are ever the same, self-identical and self-existent, absolute, separate, simple, and without beginning or end.<sup>5</sup> They are complete, perfect, existent in every respect.<sup>6</sup> In short, in contrast to the

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedo*, 78 D–79 C. *Symposium*, 211 A.

<sup>2</sup> *Phaedrus*, 247 C.

<sup>3</sup> *Phaedo*, 79 A.

<sup>4</sup> *Rep.*, X, 296 A. Cf. Aristotle, *Met.*, I, 9, 990b, 6 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Phaedo*, 78 D–79 C. *Symposium*, 211 A.

<sup>6</sup> *Phaedrus*, 247 C–E. *Rep.*, VI, 493 E, 507 B, X, 597 D. *Phaedo*, 65 D, 78 D, 100 C.

shifting, impermanent, multiple world of sensible objects they bear all the earmarks of true being. They are the real essences of things, the only genuine existences, the things that really are. Moreover, as we have lately seen, taken altogether, they fit into one another and form one interconnected Whole—so that their different splendors seem to radiate from a single principle, a common denominator, present in them all, the essence of all the meanings and values present in the world. And this essence Plato seems to elevate into a separate and supreme Idea, a Form of which all other Forms are particular instances and partial aspects.

Let us now press on to explore this Rome to which all roads lead. Two questions are perhaps uppermost in our minds. How big is it, and of what stuff is it built? In other words, what is the extent of the world of Forms or Ideas, and just what kind of existence does Plato attribute to it? Both are important and disputed problems, but the question of its size is more quickly disposed of. We begin then with that.

So far as we can judge from the dialogues with which we have been dealing, no limit is set to the number and kind of Forms. Wherever two or three phenomena are gathered together under a single name, there a Form is present also, so that there are as many Ideas as there are possibilities of grouping things under headings and applying to them a common term.<sup>7</sup> More specifically we find Plato mentioning Forms of all sorts of qualities and values of the most heterogeneous sort, moral, aesthetic, and physical. Thus we have virtues like temperance, courage, liberality, and magnificence;<sup>8</sup> aesthetic values like beauty;<sup>9</sup> physical qualities like health and strength,<sup>10</sup> color, shape, and sound,<sup>11</sup> swiftness and slowness.<sup>12</sup> Also, there are Ideas of natural objects,<sup>13</sup> and of artificial objects such as beds and tables;<sup>14</sup> of categories and relations such

<sup>7</sup> *Rep.*, X, 596 A.

<sup>8</sup> *Rep.*, II, 402 C.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*.

<sup>10</sup> *Phaedo*, 65 D.

<sup>11</sup> *Cratylus*, 423 E.

<sup>12</sup> *Rep.*, VII, 529 D.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Met.*, XII, 3, 1070a ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Rep.*, X, 596 A.



as sameness and difference, equality, greatness and smallness;<sup>15</sup> and even of evil and negative things.<sup>16</sup> But the scattered and diverse character of these references does not necessarily betray any confusion or diffuseness in Plato's thought. It is simply that at every turn the universe meets our demands upon it for rationality and order, and that wherever we look we find nothing that is not food for thought and capable of incorporation in the body of truth.

Plato, however, does not seem to have made himself wholly clear even to his contemporaries on this point, for we find Aristotle accusing him of having arbitrarily excluded from the realm of Forms Ideas of artificial objects, negations, and relative terms. And a recent commentator<sup>17</sup> has raised the question whether in the later dialogues Plato did not shed the Ideas not only of relations, negations, and artificial objects, but of everything except natural species. The latter view, however, has been vigorously combatted and is not generally accepted. And Aristotle's criticisms have been examined and so explained as not to conflict with the Platonic assertions.<sup>18</sup> We may, then, having noted these differences of opinion, leave the point to one side.

The other problem, that of the precise kind of existence attributed to the realm of Forms, is much more intricate and is at the moment much debated. The gist of it is whether the theory of Ideas is a logic or a metaphysics; that is, whether Plato attributes to the Forms the kind of existence possessed by a law of nature or a true proposition, or the kind of existence we attribute to a God.

The metaphysical interpretation has been in vogue from the time of Aristotle down to the present day. Aristotle inveighed against his master on the ground that he merely reduplicated the world of sensible objects on a divine, gigantic scale, remarking that just as the Gods of popular mythology were nothing but eternal men, so the Forms were nothing but eternal sensible *things*. For, after all, the man-in-himself, or horse-

<sup>15</sup> *Rep.*, V, 454 A-B. *Phaedo*, 100 E.

<sup>16</sup> *Rep.*, III, 402 C. V, 475 E-476 A. Cf. *Parmenides*, 129 D-E.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Robin, *Théorie Platonicienne*, ch. III, pp. 173 ff.

in-itself, or health-in-itself of which Plato talks is just like the particular man or horse or instance of health, except that it is imperishable and eternal whereas the particulars are perishable.<sup>19</sup> Again, Aristotle tells us, Plato attributes substantial existence to general concepts, thereby turning them into individual objects—which is a contradiction in terms and absurd.<sup>20</sup> In other words, according to Aristotle Plato conceived the Forms as quasi-concrete beings, existing of themselves in a kind of philosophic heaven—metaphysical models of what goes on in the flux, laid up in a celestial show case.

It must be admitted that there is much in Plato's phrasing that invites such an interpretation. The essence of absolute beauty towards which love yearns, the universal and changeless principles that dominate all moral life, the immutable types and laws in which the scientific interest in understanding the world comes to rest, and the final vision of Reality as a single intelligible whole, or in other words, the Form of the Good:—all these are constantly spoken of as if they were what we should call Gods of sorts, immaterial yet concrete and potent beings endowed with every perfection, displayed in the world of sense yet existing independently of it. And this probably is the notion we have gathered of them at the moment.

Moreover, if we repeat our old trick of seeking to evolve Plato out of our own experience, there is much in the result to favor this view. Suppose, for example, we try to analyze what we really have in mind when we entertain a general concept. We find at once that it is impossible to attain complete abstraction in our thought. Strive as we may, there always remains a tiny, inextinguishable core of imagery at the heart of every universal. No matter how scientifically, universally, and abstractly we may seem to ourselves to be thinking of man-in-general, or temperance-in-general, or smallness-in-general, our idea is ever on the verge of coagulating into a blurred, fleeting picture of a particular man, or a specific instance of temperance, or something small, which becomes a sort of symbol or nucleus of the abstract concept. But images and pictures are

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Met.*, III, 3, 997b, 8 ff.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 1003a, 7-13; VII, 16, 1040 B, 23-29.

sensible and concrete, of things, not of abstractions, and they are fringed with space and time and materiality. Plato, to be sure, is aware of this inclination of ideas to condense into images, is on his guard against it, and seeks to clear his Forms of every trace of sense. Still, it would not be surprising if this ineradicable tendency of thought were too much for him. He could not think of his Ideas without picturing them, he could not picture them without making them *things*. And even if the picture were deliberately suppressed, it might, like the Cheshire cat, leave its smile behind it pervading the abstract concept with a subtle warmth and flavor of concrete existence. Merely as objects of knowledge, then, the types and laws and values discovered in the sensible world might detach themselves from it, envelop themselves in a kind of astral body of their own, and become the doubles of the phenomena they described.

But there is more to the matter than this. Plato, like most of us, was inclined to think of the type not as an average but as a standard. His Ideas turned into ideals. The typical cow was not a grade but a pedigreed nature. Horse-in-general was not any old nag but a thoroughbred. The Form of man was an idealized portrait, not a composite photograph, of human nature. Health-in-general was not ordinary but glowing well-being. In short, the Forms were typical in the sense that the breeder of stock or the dog-fancier uses the term. They possessed all the prize points that we would like to see incorporated in the individual. They were beautiful and good as well as true; or rather, their truth and beauty and goodness flowed together to form a single indissoluble perfection.

Now the moment that an abstract idea is charged with moral and aesthetic values and turns into an ideal, it becomes, to put it paradoxically, nothing but a concrete example of itself. It is practically all picture. Our love and reverence for an idea attach themselves not to what is abstract in it but to its core of imagery, thanks to which alone it can become a "vision." When we profess ourselves willing to die for the idea of freedom, for example, it is not for the definition of liberty in the dictionary but for all the concrete things liberty means to us that we are ready to sacrifice ourselves. Or again, my observa-



tion of human nature may result in a general formula, but when I exhort you to be a man, it is not that formula but an image of the paragon I would have you be that floats before my eyes.

In a word, if even the most abstract truth tends to be thought of concretely and to become a *thing*, the tendency is multiplied a hundredfold in the case of goodness and beauty.<sup>21</sup> And we have only to let ourselves drift with it to find ourselves in the world of Platonic Ideas. The thing-like feel imparted to general concepts by their core of imagery, especially when it is loaded with moral and aesthetic values, assumes metaphysical weight and gives them a kind of immaterial substantiality not unlike the "spiritual" being we commonly attribute to God. At the same time, their abstract natures, their changelessness and universality, and the halo of perfection that gathers about them exalt these "spiritual" entities high above the material world and turn them into "ultimate realities."<sup>22</sup>

Taken all in all, then, there is a good deal not only in the Dialogues but in the workings of the human mind to support what we might call a "two-story" interpretation of the Platonic theory, and the Ideas have generally figured in the history of philosophy as self-existent, quasi-divine, metaphysical beings, bright and perfect archetypes of the gross things of earth, the only true realities, laid up in a heaven of their own and only incidentally reflected in the broken and dissolving images of the flux.

Moreover, this metaphysical filling of the immaterial concreteness injected into things like types and laws and values, which makes them self-enacting and self-supporting, involves us inevitably in a dualistic theory of the universe. We find ourselves with two *enacted* orders of existence on our hands. On the one hand we have a world of divine archetypes or patterns—a set of dies as it were of the purest metal and the clearest cut, which no amount of stamping can alter or mar, immune to the rusting and rubbing of time and change. And on the

<sup>21</sup> On this tendency to visualize universals and endow them with beauty and perfection *cf.* Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-185.

<sup>22</sup> *Cf.* Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, pp. 222-224.

other we have a profuse coinage of sensible tokens in space and time, struck from these dies, to be sure, and impressed with their images, but minted in an alloy of stuff so base and so friable that they are already blurred and crumbling at the moment of their issue. The world of Forms becomes separated from the world of particular objects. The singleness and eternity of the essence or type is set over against the multiplicity and mortality of its instances. Immaterial is contrasted with material substance. Complete perfection is opposed to a dumping ground of every imperfection. This metaphysical dualism, naturally, supplies a breeding-ground for insidious moral distinctions, and the contrast between the two orders turns almost immediately into one of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, mind and matter, the spirit and the flesh, God and his enemies. Thus the Ideas tend to become, only too quickly, a repository for every perfection, the sensible world a dumping ground for everything we do not like.

Recently, however, the traditional view has been challenged. Aristotle's criticism has been laid to a misunderstanding, such as frequently occurs when the pupil is not over-sympathetic with his master, and the Dialogues have been subjected to a new scrutiny. The result is a "one-story" theory of the Ideas, which demolishes the Forms as metaphysical beings, and brings the whole system down to a single level. According to the advocates of this theory, among whom are numbered some of our greatest modern scholars, the Forms were for Plato merely the equivalent of what we should call logical essences. They were the meanings things have for us. By some of these critics they are identified with the eternal conditions or possibilities of existence to which any world must conform. Or they are said to have the reality of validity as opposed to that of existence. For example, all the propositions that can be made of a triangle hold good, whether or not any triangular things exist. Or again, the Forms are likened to scientific hypotheses.<sup>23</sup> And finally, they are identified with natural laws<sup>24</sup> and

<sup>23</sup> Von Hartmann, Lotze, and Jackson respectively. For a reference to them cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> Natorp's view set forth in his *Platons Ideenlehre*.

aesthetic and moral values.<sup>25</sup> From this point of view, the Ideas were for Plato, so far as he was a scientist, the concepts that described and explained sensible objects and their behavior. So far as he was an artist and moral reformer they were also visualizations of the perfection towards which men strive and yearn. But in any case the kind of existence he attributed to them was precisely the kind of existence we attribute to a natural law or a value, not the kind we attribute to a concrete object or a God. Their being was no more metaphysical than it was physical. It was simply logical.<sup>26</sup>

Let us try to make this logical sort of existence a little clearer. The forms or natures, for example, of the lion and the unicorn are both equally possible, equally logical kinds of animals, but by an accident of evolution the one has been enacted in the course of nature, the other not. Nevertheless, despite the failure of the unicorn to be registered by the physical world, it still exists no less than the lion as a valid form or essence that can be talked about and pictured, and that even might be eventually embodied by some future twist of the evolutionary process. The imagination cannot be said to have created it, for unless it were already a possible and thinkable Form, it could never have been thought up. The mind has simply got ahead of matter and stumbled upon it, already there, waiting to be discovered and perhaps, with luck, to be given living, physical instances of itself. In spite then of its present lack of enactment by Nature it must exist in and of itself. For if it did not exist it could not appear on the British arms, or be an object of possible biological embodiment. So, too, the last living specimen of that unwieldy bird, the dodo, was seen on the island of Mauritius about 1681, but the nature of the dodo did not become extinct when the last instance of the species disappeared. On the contrary it survived to be entertained and described by modern naturalists. If the Form of the dodo had perished, too, the accounts of old explorers and the finding of remains would have meant nothing to us, for the meaning of those accounts and those remains would have been blotted

<sup>25</sup> Stewart's supplementation of Natorp's view.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, pp. 77 et seq.



out along with the individual birds. The species is still a perfectly good species, and exists as such, even though it is no longer enacted.

Again, the number two is not two things, or two persons, or two Gods. Yet it exists in and for itself as a mathematical entity. The law of gravitation is not a gravitating body, nor is it merely an idea in some mind. It would remain as a possible formula, a manner in which bodies might still behave, even if bodies at some future time ceased to obey it, or if all bodies and all minds were destroyed. And the nature of virtue, or the nature of beauty, does not have to be staged anywhere in heaven or earth in order to be what it is. Essences then, have an existence of their own, but it is an entirely different kind of existence from that of things or thoughts human or divine.

Obviously, existence of this sort does not in any way reduplicate the sensible world or add a second quasi-concrete story to the universe, as the Gods reduplicate human nature on a divine scale or as the celestial hierarchy superimposes upon the natural world a supernatural world composed of "spiritual substances." It merely distinguishes the plan of the single storey as something separate from and independent of the bricks and mortar that embody it. But the plan when separated does not thereby become a model, more than life size and more perfect than the house itself, built of a kind of ethereal *papier-maché*.

For all that, however, such existence is of no mean sort. All the laudatory terms that Plato uses of the Forms are as applicable to it as they would be to metaphysical, divine beings. The number two, the form of the dodo, the cat-type or the dog-type, the true nature of virtue, whatever it may be, the propositions that hold good of a triangle—all these are as apart from and independent of the world of sense, as changeless, as absolute, as eternal, as omnipresent, as any God could be. Time makes no difference to them. The infinite reaches of space do not dissipate their validity. Worlds may rise and fall, the entire universe, all things, all minds, all Gods may vanish into sheer nothingness, but the lines upon which new universes might be formed, the shapes that they might assume, remain unscathed.

From everlasting to everlasting they hold good. Raised, then, as they are above space and time, life, thought, and substantiality material and "spiritual," we might rightly claim for these logical essences, quite as well as for metaphysical entities, the dignity of absolute reality, and say of them, as Plato said of the Ideas, that they have the truest being.

Such, according to the "one-storey," logical essence theory, is the status or kind of existence attributed by Plato to his Forms. It stands out, we see, in striking contrast to the kind of existence ascribed to them by the traditional, "two-storey," metaphysical interpretation. It will be well perhaps to sum up the agreements and differences between the two views in brief and somewhat pictorially, before we take up the next important question, that of the Idea of the Good. We may put the matter as follows. Plato, we may say, saw that the moving, dissolving world of sensible objects exhibited a fixed set of types and laws and values. These constituted for him, on the one hand, a map or plan of the universe, plotted by logic and science, abstract, austere, world without end the same, bathed in the shadowless and impartial light of truth. But the mind also tended to wax enthusiastic over certain features of this map. Truth, goodness, beauty were not merely essences to be noted and analyzed, but things to be fought and even to be died for. This enthusiasm and devotion colored the plan and made of it a panorama, and kept throwing into high relief individual moments and details which shone out from the rest, touched by

"The light that never was on sea or land  
The consecration and the poet's dream,"

and became in the sudden and splendid isolation of their beauty or their moral grandeur Essences incarnate, full of life and grace, as well as truth.

So far so good. Now the divergence of opinion begins. According to the traditional theory, this plan discovered by science and logic, and glorified into a panorama by the *love* of truth and goodness and beauty, Plato took to be a second world of divine archetypes or patterns enacted outside the world of sense in some metaphysical "spiritual" substance.

In a word, he turned the general "lay out" of the world into a model in the image of which the phenomenal universe was fashioned. According to the "one-storey" view, however, he did no such thing. He never supposed that the plan was a separate world, or that it was originally traced and the panorama painted in a metaphysical medium, and only secondarily impressed upon phenomena. There was no second *enacted* order of existence for him. Forms, laws, values, meanings, although they had a real, logical being of their own apart from particular things—a being that might even be called more real than that of the unstable and perishable sensible objects—were nevertheless enacted and took on concreteness and substantiality in the world of sense alone.

## II

Bearing these conflicting interpretations in mind we now turn to the question of the status of the Idea of the Good. The point is all the more difficult because of our lack of original documentation. The passages in which Plato explicitly takes up the subject—those in the *Republic*—are as small in quantity as they are great in quality. He gave, to be sure, some famous lectures on the Good which apparently puzzled his pupils and were incorrectly reported by them. But even these misleading accounts have disappeared. And both Aristotle and the immediate successors of Plato in the Academy lay no stress on this aspect of his teaching in their interpretations and criticisms of their master.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the Idea of the Good was lost, not to be rediscovered till, some centuries later, the mystical Neo-Platonists, returning to him for their inspiration, seized upon it and made it the forerunner of their own doctrine of the ineffable Unity, higher than thought, higher than being, from whose inexhaustible depths, first the Platonic Forms, and then the rest of creation, emanate, even as light radiates from the central, blinding core of the sun.

That Neo-Platonism may really represent the direction in which Plato was heading at the time the *Republic* was written

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 221, 233. Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–55.



has been suggested by a modern commentator. The passages in the sixth and seventh books, he feels, show an increasing dislike for the Megaric identification of the Socratic Good with Eleatic Being, and betray a line of thought that, if it had persisted, might easily have ended in an emanation theory, with the Idea of the Good a veritable metaphysical fountain both of all Forms and all minds.<sup>28</sup> And not unnaturally the adherents of the "two-storey" view of the Forms have followed the Neo-Platonists to the extent, at least, of adding the Idea of the Good as a third floor. Thus some critics identify it with a divine mind or a quasi-personal God, while others consider it a principle transcending even deity.<sup>29</sup> And still others without engaging in this controversy feel that it "occupies a place in regard to morals and to science which the conception of God would occupy in a modern philosophy of morals and nature if that philosophy considered the conception of God an essential to its system."<sup>30</sup>

The "one-storey" school of criticism, however, having left no second floor in the Platonic system for a third to stand on, has brought the Idea of the Good down to the same level as the rest of the Forms. Its transcendence of the other Ideas, and even of being and reason, is no more to be interpreted metaphysically, we are told, than is the apartness of Forms from the world of sense-particulars. As we have seen, it expresses the fact that the nature of Reality is not the mere sum of its different features, but is those features arranged so as to constitute an intelligible whole; just as in a picture-puzzle the picture is more than a box full of pieces, is the pieces so fitted together that they make up in their ensemble a single design or Form. Only in the light of the whole can the real meaning of the parts become visible. Or, to put it in Plato's terms, the plan of Reality, seen in its entirety, transcends the being of any or of all of its constituent essences or Forms, and the bird's-

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 232 ff. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 422 ff. Robin, *Théorie Platonicienne*, pp. 598 ff.

<sup>29</sup> For such identification cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 279 ff. Adam, *Republic of Plato*, II, pp. 50-51. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.* Against, cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-235. More, *Religion of Plato*, pp. 119 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Nettleship, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-233.

eye vision that so sees it is higher than the process of reasoning from one detail to another, which can look only a few steps ahead. But this is not to say that the plan regarded in its entirety requires a new, separate set of drawings. One and the same sketch can give both the whole and the parts. For instance, the completed picture-puzzle showing the design that dictates the position and relations of the pieces is not a new puzzle different from the pieces that lie jumbled in the box. So, the Idea of the Good, the all-inclusive, all-explaining Form that stands out when dialectic has fitted the various Forms together in their proper logical relations, is not a different *thing* from the other Ideas. It is not a super-being, not a transcendent metaphysical entity. It is simply the Form or Nature of the totality of existence comprehended as a single fact.<sup>31</sup> Or, in order to include the aesthetic and moral values also, which attach themselves to the Forms and make of them perfections, we may say that the Idea of the Good focuses our desire for a world altogether responsive to all human interests and activities, not only intelligible through and through but completely harmonious and beautiful as well. It is the vision of a universe that answers in every respect the demand for absolute truth, goodness, and beauty. In a word, to quote a great champion of the "one-storey" theory, it is "the whole Universe over against the whole man."<sup>32</sup>

In view of these difficulties and disagreements in interpretation, there is nothing to do but to leave the question of the status of the Forms and of the Idea of the Good wide open. We have had a first and generous taste of the controversy that rages over Plato's real meaning, and we may recall the warning we sounded, when we first took up his system, with regard to the inconclusive character of much of his thought. Moreover, we may console ourselves with the reflection that whatever view we may take, we shall find ourselves in good company.

But whatever view Plato himself took—whether he regarded the Forms as logical essences enacted only in the world of sense,

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 183 ff. Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 51 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

or looked upon them as metaphysical beings which found their true enactment and home in some "heaven beyond the heavens"—he was launched upon a sea of troubles. For in a sense the Aristotelian criticism was acute. In any case the Ideas were different from the sensible particulars and had an existence, even if it were only logical, independent of them. Nay more, as logical beings, no less than as metaphysical entities, they existed apart, not only from the things that embodied, but also from the minds that entertained them. They were no more thoughts than they were things. Plato, then, was hard put to it by his own perplexities and doubtless by the criticism of others to make clear the relations of the Forms both to the flux of sense which displayed them and to the knowledge of which they were the objects. How, we might ask ourselves, can the abstract law of gravitation and the concrete gravitating bodies, absolutely different as they are, ever embrace one another? Furthermore, how can an immaterial essence make itself known through the alien medium of physical phenomena to a mind dependent, it would seem, upon the senses for all its information about things outside itself? We never perceive the law of gravitation or human nature in the abstract. How, then, can we know them? And knowing them here and there and individually—the law of gravitation, the nature of virtue, the universal tableness in all tables—how can we put them together logically, interpret them correctly, pass from one to another, and gradually build up a Form or design of the whole? No one of them, nor yet the whole collection of them, suggests what the design is, any more than the pieces of the puzzle as they lie jumbled in the box suggest, separately or together, the nature of the picture into which they fit. Moreover, supposing the Forms to have the greater reality and to be, as Plato expressly states, the only true beings, what are we to say of the sensible world? Has it no reality? Is it, as the Eleatics insisted, all illusion and false opinion? Or if it has reality, how does its reality compare with that of the Forms? And how can Reality be both changeless and immaterial, as in the Forms, and changing and material, as in the flux, all at the same time? And why does



the sensible kind of reality exist at all? It can scarcely be called self-existent, since its components are continually coming into and passing out of being. What, then, accounts for its presence, and why is it the kind of world it is and not some other kind?

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RELATION OF THE IDEAS TO KNOWLEDGE AND SENSE

QUESTIONS like those that concluded our last chapter must sooner or later press for an answer. And some of them were already weighing on Plato's mind and had evoked a provisional reply. Two problems particularly were to the fore—the relation of the particular object to the universal type that gave it a nature, and the ability of the mind in the act of knowledge to recognize Forms without, apparently, ever having seen them. The first question Plato approached in the belief that, although it was their Forms that made individual data what they were, turned them from nameless blurs into definite things, and invested them with being, still, the universal was not all that was real in the particular. Human nature was not the whole being of you and me. The quality of courage was not all there was to a courageous act. The individual *qua* individual also existed. The passing show of events, then, for all its shifting, dissolving multiplicity could not be dismissed, as the Eleatics had dismissed it, as all false opinion and sheer illusion. It was not a mirage; it was really there and had to be brought into relation to the world of Forms.<sup>1</sup>

The first steps in Plato's, or it may be in Socrates', attempt to work out the relations between the concrete object and its Form have been mentioned in the chapter on Socrates. He could not, we have seen, accept the Pythagorean suggestion that particular things are copies or imitations of the Ideas, although he employs the figure frequently, as, for example, in his criticism of the arts, and persists in its use till the end.<sup>2</sup> He doubtless realized that, although a useful figure of speech, to take it at its face value only deepened the gap he was so

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 383 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 155 ff.

anxious to bridge. However that may be, he proposed as a substitute or supplement the notion of *participation*. The particulars *share* in the Forms. The Forms are somehow present in the particulars. Individual objects *partake* of greatness and smallness, beauty, virtue, and the like, and these essences inhere in the things that display them.<sup>3</sup>

But he was by no means out of the woods. The new terms, as they stood, were no guide at all. They had first to be explained. Just what do we mean when we say that individual men partake of human nature, or that abstract and universal beauty makes Helen what she is by its presence in her? Aristotle said bluntly that participation was as unsatisfactory<sup>4</sup> a notion as imitation,<sup>5</sup> that it involved many self-contradictions,<sup>6</sup> and that it could neither explain the existence of a sensible world nor account for the movement and change in phenomena.<sup>7</sup> And many modern critics have felt that it exposes a weakness rather than a strength in Plato's thought, and that the problem of the relation of the particular to the universal, the sensible to the intelligible, remained on his hands to the end unsolved.<sup>8</sup> Others, however, have tried to give it a satisfactory interpretation. For instance, we are told that the Aristotelean criticism is unfair, and that if we only regard the Idea as a logical essence and not as a substance, it can then be conceived as entering into all sorts of different groupings and helping form myriads of individual objects, without repeating itself in space and time. And the notion of participation, far from being an absurdity, is a very apt expression for the way in which the flux is constantly re-registering in a thousand co-existent and successive instances the infinite fertility of possible logical combinations of more general in more specific Forms. Thus, when we say that individual men partake of human nature, and individual horses of the Idea of the horse, we mean simply that

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Phaedo*, 100-105.

<sup>4</sup> *Met.*, VIII, 6, 1045b, 7-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Met.*, I, 9, 991a, 20-991b, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Met.*, I, 990b, 22-34. Z., 14, 1039b, 2-4. Z., 4, 1030a, 10-14.

<sup>7</sup> *Met.*, VII, 4, 1030a, 10-14; 6, 1071a, 27 ff.; 9, 991a, 8-11. For a discussion of Aristotle's objections cf. Robin, *Théorie Platonicienne*, pp. 73-97.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 332 ff.



essences like those of flesh, blood, bone, etc., possess an inexhaustible logical capacity for being assembled over and over again in an equine or a human Form.<sup>9</sup>

② Somewhat similar is the "intersection" theory, already discussed in the chapter on Socrates, which suggests that individual, sensible objects are caused by the overlapping of Forms.<sup>10</sup> For example, whiteness-in-itself, or roundness-in-itself and other universal natures, in themselves pure essences, produce, when crossed, the particular golf-ball, just as lines when crossed produce individual points. And just as the line is not broken up or diminished in length by the occurrence of the points, and may be dotted its full length over and over again without ceasing to be a line, so innumerable golf-balls, old and new, may partake of the natures of whiteness, roundness, and the like without dividing or altering them. ③ Again, to cite yet another interpretation, it is argued that the participation "of the particular in the Idea means in logic simply the relation of the particular case to law. . . . The statement 'this thing is beautiful' is, if true, justified by its conformity with the fundamental judgment which sets forth the nature of the Beautiful."<sup>11</sup> In other words, participation in a Form means fulfilling the requirements laid down by the meaning of beauty or courage or cat or dog or what not. And participation in this sense does not imply any splitting up and sharing of the Form among its particulars.

Such are some of the interpretations of what Plato meant by *participation*. Taken in connection with the opinion that he never succeeded in making the notion intelligible, they show that the ground is uncertain and that we must tread warily. But whether he made sense or nonsense of the idea, the difficulty it was designed to meet of relating the particular, concrete objects to their Forms keeps recurring in one guise or another, and we shall find him constantly amending or elaborating his thought, as the case may be. For the moment, however, we may leave it to one side and glance at the other beset-

<sup>9</sup> Robin, *Théorie Platonicienne*, pp. 118 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 164 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

ting problem of the moment—how we can know things like Forms which are not objects of sense.

With the nature of this difficulty, also, we became familiar in the chapter on Socrates. We saw there that the mind was shut up in the body and was in contact with the outside world through the five senses alone. Perception, however, acquainted it only with the flux, with a hurly-burly of inchoate, disordered sense-stuff. Forms, types, laws, values, could not be seen or heard, touched, tasted, or smelled. And yet the mind displayed a most mysterious faculty for distinguishing, associating, grouping, and evaluating the crude items of sense. Like the uncanny child naming correctly, at his first visit to the menagerie, animals he apparently had never seen or heard of before, it could spot in the passing show now the human Form, now tableness or bedness, here the Pythagorean proposition or some other mathematical law, there the natures of goodness or of beauty. Somehow the flux appeared to be constantly reminding it of something other than perception, and its ability to see similarities and differences, to combine and to group, seemed to involve a kind of recognition of types and laws and values in the data it met, like the recognition of the features of an old friend. At birth, indeed, the soul was apparently in possession of latent impressions of these features. And the whole process and increase of knowledge might well be described as a growth that started with a vague feeling of familiarity and gradually puzzled through to a sense of complete recall and reconstruction. What then was knowledge? How were we to account, apparently sense-bred as it was, for its first shy recognition of supersensible entities like Forms and laws and values, and for the bold way in which it went on, as if to the manor born, to consort and reminisce with them in science and philosophy?

To explain this capacity for transcending the world of sense and for grasping the universal and the changeless in the changing particular, Plato resorts to mythological and poetic language and sets forth the famous doctrine of knowledge as Recollection. In the *Meno*, we may remember, he had invoked reminiscence to account for the innate character of vir-

tue. In some former existence, he suggested, we might have beheld the essence of goodness face to face, and all that moral education perhaps did was to bring out our latent memory of that with which we once had been fully acquainted. The *Phaedo*, too, dwells upon the necessity of supposing the soul to have existed before birth and in her pre-natal state to have been directly conversant with the Ideas, if we are to explain satisfactorily our ability to be reminded of essences like absolute equality, beauty, goodness, justice, and holiness, by the rough and imperfect likenesses of them we find in the world of sense.<sup>12</sup> But it is in the *Phaedrus* myth, to which we now return after a long absence, that the nature of this pre-natal vision is depicted at length and in detail.

Enlarging upon the famous picture of the soul as a charioteer, Plato tells us that the Gods are wont to go in procession through the streets of heaven and finally to mount to the outside of the outermost sphere, where, checking their perfectly matched steeds, "they stand upon the top of heaven and the revolution of the spheres carries them round, and they behold the world beyond." As they are carried, they behold "justice, temperance, and knowledge absolute, not in the form of generation or relation, which men call existence, but knowledge absolute in existence absolute and . . . other existences in like manner." And feeding as they do upon mind and pure knowledge, they rejoice and are replenished by the spectacle of truth.

Now, of the lesser souls those most like to the Gods succeed in following them to the outer world, but even they are so troubled by their ill-matched steeds and by the kicking and rearing of their propensity towards earth that they get but broken glimpses of true being. "The rest of the souls are also longing after the upper world, and they all follow, but not being strong enough they sink into the gulf as they are carried round, plunging, treading on one another, striving to be first . . . and many of them are lamed or have their wings broken through the ill-driving of the charioteers; and all of them after a fruitless toil go away without being initiated into the myster-

<sup>12</sup> *Phaedo*, 73 ff.



ies of being, and are nursed with the food of opinion." So long as the souls succeed in accompanying the Gods they remain unborn, secure in heaven. But when any one of them fails through some mishap to behold the vision of truth, she falls at once into the body and is born a man—a philosopher, or artist, or musician, or lover, if she has seen the most of truth, a righteous king or warrior or lord, if she has seen a little less, and so on down to the extreme blindness of the sophist or demagogue or tyrant. But all earthly life is a state of probation "in which he who lives righteously improves, and he who lives unrighteously deteriorates his lot," and at death the soul goes away to undergo purification for a thousand years in a sort of purgatory, and then is born again according to her deserts, it may be even in an animal. Not till after ten births and ten such purgatorial periods can she hope to win her way back to God. An exception, however, is made in the case of those who have philosophized and those who have loved much. Such, if they have been steadfast through three lives, may be given their wings and return to heaven at the end of three thousand years. The souls, however, that fall without ever having seen the Forms are born at once as animals. For they are irrational and non-human, since they lack the power "to proceed from many particulars of sense to one conception of reason," which is the essence of intelligence "and is the recollection of those things which our soul once saw when in company with God—when looking down on that which we now call being (i.e. the material world) and upwards towards true being (i.e. the Ideas)."

Every human soul then "has in the way of nature beheld true being. But all men do not easily recall the things of the other world; they may have seen them for a short time only, or they may have been unfortunate when they fell to earth, and may have lost the memory of the holy things which they saw there, through some evil and corrupting association. Few there are who retain the remembrance of them sufficiently; and they, when they behold any image of that other world, are rapt in amazement; but they are ignorant of what this means, because they have no clear perceptions. For there is no light in

the earthly copies of justice or temperance or any of the higher qualities which are precious to souls: they are seen but through a glass dimly; and there are few who, going to the images, behold in them the realities, and they only with difficulty."<sup>13</sup>

This description of the pre-existence and transmigration of the soul is supplemented by "myths" at the end of the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* in which the doctrine of Reminiscence is given a moral turn and brought to bear upon the difficulty of reconciling the sufferings of the innocent and the prosperity of the wicked with the justice of God and a moral government of the world. In the *Phaedrus*, as we saw, the initial fall and original sin of the soul is due to an inherent coarse streak, symbolized by the refractory steed yoked to her chariot, which pulls her down to the life of sense. Overcome by this, she enters the body, the sensible world, and the cycle of birth and rebirth. After each death, furthermore, she is judged and punished or rewarded according to her deserts, in a discarnate interval of existence.<sup>14</sup> In the *Gorgias*,<sup>15</sup> the *Republic*<sup>16</sup> and the *Phaedo*<sup>17</sup> the nature of this disembodied state intervening between death and rebirth is described at some length and with great picturesqueness. The righteous are in joy and felicity. Sinners undergo purgatorial pains suitable to their misdeeds. There is even a hell, depicted with Dantesque vividness, where incorrigible wrongdoers, for the most part Plato's favorite tyrants, are punished everlastingly as an example of the wages of persistent sin.<sup>18</sup> But, with the exception of these, the good and the evil alike are at last ready for reincarnation. Then they are brought into the presence of the Fates and are told to select the kind of re-embodiment they desire, which once chosen shall be their destiny. Their choice, however, is explicitly declared to be free, in order that theirs may be the responsibility and that God may be justified. And they are warned not to be over-hasty and to remember that, however humble

<sup>13</sup> *Phaedrus*, 247 A-250.

<sup>14</sup> *Phaedrus*, 248-249.

<sup>15</sup> *Gorgias*, 523 ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Rep.*, X, 614 C ff.

<sup>17</sup> *Phaedo*, 112 E ff.

<sup>18</sup> *Gorgias*, 525. *Rep.*, X, 615 D-616 A. *Phaedo*, 113 D-114 C.

a career may be, it may still be made a means of happiness and salvation. Then the souls draw lots and proceed, in order, to an examination of samples of all sorts, both human and animal, and make their selection. But their choice, for all that it is free, proves to be determined by the character of their past existences. Those whose minds have been darkened by folly and sensuality clutch greedily at the career of a tyrant, whereas the wise and chastened pick out quiet and inconspicuous lives. And some even select animal existences from spite or affinity. The souls of animals, too, are free to choose and pass into other animal forms or into human beings. Finally, when all have chosen, their selection is confirmed by the Fates, and having drunk of the waters of Lethe, which makes them forget their former lives, they are despatched to their rebirths.<sup>19</sup>

These pictures are painted with colors borrowed from the Orphic-Pythagorean palette, and are not meant, as Plato himself says, to be taken too seriously.<sup>20</sup> The moral they illustrate is the important thing—that the good man has nothing to fear from death,<sup>21</sup> that the wicked are eventually punished and purified, that we are what we are because we have been what we have been, and that we should blame our own past follies and weaknesses for our present mishaps, not, as is so often the case, chance and the Gods and everything and everybody rather than ourselves.<sup>22</sup>

Whether Plato also means us to take figuratively and with a grain of salt the doctrine of Reminiscence itself, as a poetic expression of the way in which, in the act of knowledge, the world of sense puts us in mind of the world of essences, or whether we are to regard it as a serious, philosophic explanation of our possession of a rational and moral nature, is a more debatable point. To take it literally comports with the “two-storey” interpretation of the Ideas as quasi-divine beings enacted in and for themselves in some metaphysical “heaven beyond the heavens.” And supporters of this view have generally accepted the argument that knowledge as Recollection

<sup>19</sup> *Rep.*, X, 616 B–621 B.

<sup>20</sup> *Phaedo*, 114 D.

<sup>21</sup> *Phaedo*, 114 E, 115 A.

<sup>22</sup> *Cf. Rep.*, X, 619 C.



is seriously intended, and have considered it a vital part of the Platonic epistemology.<sup>23</sup>

Plato himself, however, confesses to a certain lack of confidence in the literal truth of the doctrine.<sup>24</sup> It is difficult, too, to reconcile it as literal fact with the "one-storey" theory of the Forms. Hence those who regard the Ideas, not as metaphysical entities, but as simple logical essences and "visions," are inclined to look upon the Reminiscence explanation of knowledge as a somewhat misleading burst of poetry and mysticism,<sup>25</sup> or, at the most, as an allegory of the psychological flavor of memory with which knowledge is impregnated. Suppose, as an illustration of the latter point, that I meet first you and then another man. I recognize his similarity to you, and my recognition of it is in a way a memory of you in him, evoked by him. Moreover, what I recognize or remember of you in him is not the points in which you two differ, but those in which you are alike—in other words, the Form or nature that you both have in common. My recognition, then, of the one of you in the other may be described as also a kind of memory of human nature in general—a reminiscence of the Idea of man. And when the common quality or nature is an object of emotion and becomes suffused with value and perfection, or in other words, when the Idea becomes an ideal, and my enthusiasm makes of it a thing divine, then my "memory" seems to read back into and reveal another, higher world. Of this reminiscent "feel" that experience, and particularly the experience of timeless and universal truth and beauty and goodness, has for us, the doctrine of Recollection, we are told, is an apt and vivid expression. Only Plato is forced by the lack of a scientific psychology to set forth in poetry and myth what we to-day can analyze and account for in psychological terms.<sup>26</sup>

The Platonic doctrine of existence after death has given rise to similar perplexities and difference of opinion. In the *Symposium*, we may remember, Plato is concerned not so much

<sup>23</sup> Cf. for example Gomperz, *op. cit.*, II, Bk. V, ch. 8; Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 406 ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Meno*, 86 B.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 34 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 192 ff.

with what we should call personal survival—an overlapping of birth and death by the individual's soul—as with a quality of life theoretically attainable in our earthly existence. Amid things temporal, we learn, we are able to perceive and to grasp the eternal, and so far as we entertain and enact only deathless visions, we may be called here and now immortal. True immortality lies in rescue from the flux, in being so preoccupied with the timeless and the changeless and the universal that time and change, personality and death, are of no account and we forget about them altogether. Compared with such deathlessness mere personal survival might seem trivial and in a way a contradiction. For it would not detach the soul from the flux but would serve to keep her immersed in it. And the desire to survive death would not betoken a love of the eternal and the universal, but would betray a lingering attachment to particular and temporal existence. Moreover, in any future life the soul could obtain the higher immortality only as she can in this, by freeing herself entirely from all sense of personal continuance and losing herself in the timeless, which does not last or continue, but simply *is*. Paradoxically enough, then, so long as the soul survives death she is not yet deathless. For to go on after death means that she is still caught in the unending cycle of rebirth, and lives on only to die again. To make herself truly immortal she must cease to care about being everlasting.

It may, then, have already seemed odd to us to find Plato interweaving with a very lofty philosophic doctrine the cruder, theological tenets of pre-existence, personal survival, and reincarnation, which were taught by the Orphics and Pythagoreans. And it will strike us, perhaps, as even stranger that in the *Phaedo*, to which we now turn, he should appear no less eager to prove the more vulgar view than he was in the *Symposium* to refine the concept of immortality and make of it a quality instead of a quantity of existence. We may note in passing that the modern philosopher, Spinoza, who rose to a similar height in his view of what constitutes true immortality, was careful to reject altogether the notion of personal survival, which he regarded as a vulgar superstition.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ethics*, V, Props. XXI ff.

The *Phaedo*, which is perhaps the most dramatic and the most touching of all Plato's writings, depicts, we may remember, the execution of Socrates. The dialogue purports to be an account of his last words with his more intimate friends and disciples. They have gathered early one morning in his prison, knowing that he must die that day. The talk, naturally enough, soon turns on immortality. Socrates expresses the belief that death is but the liberation of the soul from the bondage of the body, and is therefore not to be dreaded but rather to be desired.<sup>28</sup> Some of his disciples, however, are not so sure, fearful lest the soul vanish away into nothingness. And then the proofs begin.<sup>29</sup> In the first place, an appeal is made to the interdependence and alternation of opposites, a doctrine given philosophic form by Heracleitus, and rooted far back in primitive beliefs. Out of waking, for example, comes sleep, out of sleep waking. The same must be the case with death and life. Death obviously is generated by life, and, if the cycle is to be complete, life must be regenerated out of death.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, knowledge as reminiscence, supported by the arguments we have already noted, is brought forward as further proof, but is met by a doubt as to whether it demonstrates more than pre-existence. It is still<sup>31</sup> possible that this life is our last episode and that death may close all.<sup>32</sup> Socrates replies by pointing out that only the compound and the changing are liable to dissolution. Of this the decomposition of the body is an example. That which is simple and unchanging cannot be dissolved. Now the soul is essentially simple and unalterable. She is not a thing of sense, and her activity of thought, if left to itself and undistracted by the sensible world, is concerned wholly with the changeless and the eternal. Hence she is indissoluble.<sup>33</sup>

The disciples, however, persist in their doubts. Suppose those Pythagorean philosophers are right who hold, in curious contradiction to their doctrine of transmigration, that the soul is the harmony of the body, as the music is the harmony of

<sup>28</sup> *Phaedo*, 64-69.

<sup>29</sup> 70 A.

<sup>30</sup> 70 C-72 D.

<sup>31</sup> 72 D-77 C.

<sup>32</sup> 77 C-84 C.



the lyre. Harmony, too, is a thing "invisible, incorporeal, fair, divine, abiding in the lyre which is harmonized," but break the lyre and cut its strings, and where is its music? Or even supposing the soul to outlast one or more bodies, is there any guarantee that she will outlast them all? May she not, like a person who has worn out one old coat after another, eventually be worn out herself?<sup>33</sup> The answer is that the analogy does not hold. A harmony depends entirely upon the nature of the strings, and admits of degrees, whereas the soul directs, and frequently is in opposition to, the body. Furthermore she is invariable in essence, and is never more or less of a soul, even when she varies in virtue.<sup>34</sup>

Socrates now comes to his final argument. He tells of the development of his own philosophy and how eventually he came to regard Forms as the only true realities. And he describes the world of essences in terms with which we have already familiarized ourselves. But now what is the nature or essence of the soul? How do we define, how do we conceive her? As something living or as something dead? Obviously we conceive her as living. She participates, then, in the Idea or nature of life. But the Idea of life, like all Ideas, excludes its opposite, which is death. Hence to participate in the Idea of life is to partake of the nature of imperishability or immortality. But according to the law of contradiction anything the essence of which is immortality cannot admit of death or ever be dead, any more than the odd can be even or hot can be cold. The soul, then, when attacked by death cannot perish but will continue to exist in another world.<sup>35</sup>

To these arguments we must add one from the *Phaedrus*. There we are told that the soul is always active and in motion. Therefore she is the source of her own activity, or self-moving, and hence cannot be set in motion or stopped by anything outside herself. The behavior of bodies witnesses to this, for if they get their motion from without they are called inanimate, but if their motion comes from an inner principle they are animate and have souls. But that which is self-moving must needs be unbegotten by anything else and have no beginning. And

<sup>33</sup> 85 D-88 E.<sup>34</sup> 92 A-95 E.<sup>35</sup> 96 A-106 E.

similarly it must be indestructible and without end. If it were not so, the whole universe and all life and motion would collapse and cease. It follows that, if the soul is self-moving, "she must also be without beginning and immortal."<sup>36</sup>

Now what are we to make of all this? The proofs are not convincing, and even if they were, would establish, it has been pointed out, merely indestructibility of a soul-principle in general and its independence of the body, not the persistence of individual souls.<sup>37</sup> Still, whatever the argument may or may not try to prove, the whole tenor of the myths is that not only the soul principle but the individual soul as well, *qua* individual, survives death and is indestructible. And it is the traditional and more conservative view to credit Plato with such a belief. But in crediting him with it we cannot be too strongly on our guard against turning him into a sort of Christian apologist and attributing to him a belief in *personal* immortality as we understand the term. Nothing could be farther from his thought than the endless persistence of a man's personality in the sense of continuity of self-consciousness and feeling of identity, such as the Christian affirms. Generally speaking, such concepts as selfhood and personality, the "ego" and the "I," had not yet attained any philosophic prominence, and the freedom from these problems that so overshadow modern thought is one of the most striking characteristics of Greek speculation. So we might well be chary beforehand of trying to interpret Platonic immortality along modern lines.

It is true, of course, that personal immortality, as we understand it, figures to some extent in the picture. For a thousand years after death each individual soul retains her individuality, recognizes the souls of other people with whom she has been acquainted on earth personally or by hearsay, and spends her time in a quite Christian manner either in heaven, purgatory, or even hell. But these thousand year periods, which, after all, are mere prolongations of a type of existence essentially concrete and quasi-physical, are mere drops in the bucket of eternity. They do no more than slightly increase the

<sup>36</sup> 245 C-246 A.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 334. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

span and diversity of the *mise-en-scène* of her personal career. And that career is none the less abruptly and absolutely blotted out for being briefly prolonged. Death may not end it, but rebirth does. The waters of Lethe through which every soul must pass at the end of each allotted interval of personal existence, and then only as a preliminary to terrestrial reincarnation, annihilate once and for all the self, the individual, the person, the ego, or whatsoever we may choose to call it, that she has been on earth and in her comparatively limited hereafter. All traces of self-identity, save one, are lost, and that one is of little consequence to us Westerners with our stress upon the value of individuality and our translation of identity into terms of memory and continuity of consciousness. All that survives the rebirth of the individual soul and lasts over into the next period of personal existence is the kind of person she was in her former life. Her predilection for good or evil is the only thing about her that comes to life again in her new individual career. To this point we shall return in a moment. It may be argued, indeed, that the doctrine of Reminiscence involves a certain continuity of memory linking the soul's past with her future. But there is little comfort in memory of this sort for anyone who wishes to read into Plato immortality in the popular Christian sense.

The doctrine of Reminiscence, to be sure, asserts the pre-existence of the soul, and explains her ability to recognize the universal in the particular as a remembering of things she has once seen face to face. But though she may remember the Forms themselves, she does not remember seeing them, or the "self" that saw them. She merely explains the fact that the world of sense puts her in mind of them by supposing that she *must* somehow have once known them, though of the circumstances she recollects nothing. There is, then, no personal tie between her past and present existences, as far as Reminiscence is concerned. The doctrine belongs primarily, and almost completely, to Plato's theory of knowledge.

For that matter, the doctrines of pre-existence and Recollection are, if anything, positive arguments against personal immortality as we understand it. Since, except for the brief



discarnate interval, death is followed by rebirth, and, indeed, is equivalent to it, the inference would seem to be that the relations between our pre-mortem and post-mortem existence are in no wise different from those between our pre-natal and post-natal life. If, then, the soul's relation to what she was and did before birth is quite impersonal, her relation to what she will become after death should be no less so. As we do not remember our past existences and personalities in this life, so we ought not to remember our present careers and selves in our future incarnations. Our memories may last through the discarnate interval that separates death from rebirth, but at rebirth they should be blotted out. On this point moreover the account is explicit, and if the myth is to be taken seriously anywhere, it is so to be taken here. At the most, therefore, the soul's *personal* survival of death is comparatively short and can in no way be compared to the everlasting future of the same, continuously self-conscious individual to which so many modern doctrines of immortality look forward. Indeed, if the stress is laid upon continuity of consciousness, the Platonic teaching is not a doctrine of immortality at all. A thousand years ago some animal or man died; yesterday I was born, tomorrow I die and retain for a brief space consciousness of myself; a thousand years hence some man or animal will be born. And that is all, if the survival of personality is all that counts.

What kind of survival and continuity, then, are portrayed in the myths and supported, if any doctrine of individual immortality is supported, by the argument we have just been reviewing? The answer is—a survival of *moral* character and a continuity of *moral* causation that remind one in some ways of the “Karma” preached by the Buddhists. The different persons or “selves” that the soul successively is—the man of a thousand years ago, of to-day, and of a thousand years hence—are bridged and linked, not by memory and consciousness of identity, but by an inheritance of moral disposition and fortune descending from incarnation to incarnation. Of these accumulating sums of merit and demerit particular souls are the bearers, and only as such have they any recognizable individual immortality. My account with life, for example, with

its profits and losses, has been deposited to my credit or debit by acts performed by my special bit of soul-substance in past and forgotten existences. And what I am making of myself here and now in this incarnation will add to or subtract from the balance, and will go to open a new account for my particular soul and determine her moral wealth or poverty after death and when she is reborn. But she carries with her from birth to birth no list, no record, of the transactions that have made or lost merit for her in the past. By raising her towards the eternal I may hasten her liberation from the wheel of birth and rebirth and her return to the divine, or by enmeshing her more completely in the world of sense I may give the wheel an extra turn; but I, the self, the personality, as we to-day understand the terms, will disappear, and the works she has performed in my name will be the only part of me to live on and to contribute to her future destiny.

If we may take individual immortality in this sense as seriously intended by Plato, we can see how it might perform a double service for him. In the first place it could be of value in dealing with the problem of the disproportion of reward to merit, which has always proved a stumbling block to belief in an unimpeded moral government of the world. If a just and benevolent God really has the universe under his thumb, why do the innocent suffer and why are the guilty spared? It looks very much on the face of things as if the world were out of hand. The doctrine of the survival and transmigration of the moral character of the soul can face this question with a fairly steady eye. The original fall of the soul, indeed, it cannot perhaps explain without in the end holding God responsible or else limiting his power. But the primal lapse from perfection is too remote to be an open sore. And once the original fall is accepted, the rest is easy going. The sufferings of the innocent here and now can always be regarded as the fruit of sins committed in past existences, and the escape of the guilty can be laid to some residuum of former good, if the promise of future punishment does not seem enough to redress the balance. Thus responsibility for our plight is laid at our own door, and God, if we do not look too far back, is justified.

Now, we may remember, this is precisely a point upon which Plato is most insistent in his account of the soul's survival of death. When the instant of reincarnation arrives we are called upon to choose what our next existence shall be like. That choice is determined, to be sure, by the character of our past life, but since it is determined only by ourselves it is free, and we alone are to blame for the result. The government of the universe in no way coerces us, and God is not responsible for our decision. Thus, not only is the essential justice of things vindicated, but the very facts that seem to tell most against it are enlisted in its behalf. If, then, Plato's interest in the doctrine of Reminiscence is at heart epistemological, we might suspect that a great, if not his chief concern with the doctrine of individual survival is largely ethical and incidental to his affirmation of the harmony and goodness of the world-order.

The second service that might be rendered by a doctrine of moral survival is this. In the *Symposium* we saw that nutrition and reproduction and memory might be reckoned a species of immortality because they helped give the soul time enough to seize and retain that impersonal, timeless quality of experience in which true immortality consists. The same may be said of the persistence of the individual moral character after death. A single existence might seem as insufficient as a single moment for regaining completely the heavenly birthright, or yet for extinguishing all hope. A more elastic discipline was necessary to save or damn. Not only had many moments to be spanned in a certain wholeness of life, but many lives might have to contribute to a long growth of moral character and clarity of vision, if redemption was to be attained. Until that goal was reached the wheel of birth and rebirth must revolve. From this point of view, individual survival, as we have already suggested in the chapter on Love, might be considered a last device, in line with food, and sex, and the retention of one moment in another through memory and thought, for saving the organism from disappearance with the fleeting instant and giving it sufficient foothold amid the quicksands of time to secure a handhold on eternity.

Furthermore, whatever we may think of the metaphysical



propriety of this conjunction of immortality as union with timeless being and immortality as endless continuance in time, the two concepts, as a matter of historical fact, generally do appear together in most religious systems, although they do not both as a rule appeal to the same type of mind. In Christianity, in Mohammedanism, in Buddhism, and in Orphism, which Plato adopted, they lie side by side. This is true even of the more vulgar forms of Buddhism, where we find the same double form of immortality as both union with Reality and the survival of Karma through successive rebirths. Moreover popular imagination, there, as in Orphism, has supplemented immortality as a persistence in time of moral character and "Karma" with periods of personal survival of limited duration, and has interpolated between death and rebirth episodes of a quasi-Christian heaven, purgatory, and hell. But in Buddhism, as in Orphism and Platonism, these extensions of personal existence beyond the grave are strictly subordinate to the survival and reincarnation of "Karma" alone, which in its turn serves as no more than a mere preparation, necessitated by sin, for absorption into the timeless, impersonal bliss of Nirvana.

In Christianity, however, the situation has been more awkward. The Western exaltation of the worth of the individual, and the preference of the Occidental for movement rather than rest, have shifted the attention of the theologian, not to speak of the layman, from immortality as an eternal, timeless state of being to immortality as an everlasting living on and on, and have relegated timelessness to a secondary place. Furthermore, when Christian theology really has recognized the difference between the everlasting and the eternal, it has found itself in a quandary. For Christian orthodoxy insists that the soul, instead of being essentially divine and one with the eternal, and therefore capable of re-absorption into it, is essentially an inferior and created being, who can never, even when saved, be rescued from the necessity of going on forever. Even in her moments of beatific vision, when she sees God face to face and contemplates the timeless and the timeless only, she must still keep her distance from him and remain everlasting,

instead of escaping from endless duration and sharing his eternity. As a result we are treated to the curious spectacle of a state of being to which time has become meaningless still going on in time, or, to put it more graphically, of a soul half in and half out of the flux, able to grasp the eternal and raise herself to it with her hands, but unable to set foot upon it and forced to tread water in the time-stream, world without end.

It may, of course, be argued that, since awareness of time does not enter into the Beatific Vision, the redeemed Christian soul will be unconscious of the perpetual immersion of her spiritual body in the flow of duration, and that her divine ardors will therefore not be chilled by it. But the metaphysical and redemptive situation none the less lacks complete grace, and cannot but distress a philosophic observer of her plight.

In the midst of our solicitude for the predicament of the Christian soul we must not, however, forget the fact, already impressed upon us, that the unbaptized Platonic souls and Buddhist chains of Karma escaped this endless immersion in time and the metaphysical embarrassments, not to speak of the incomplete salvation, consequent upon it. Plato, as well as the Buddhists, realized that once the soul had succeeded in anchoring herself to a timeless reality like the Ideas or Nirvana, she could not be expected also to keep on swimming in the flux. Attainment of the one sort of existence, he saw, must automatically put a stop to the other. The temporal phase could be only temporary. The relations, then, between the timeless and the temporal became logical and coherent at Plato's hands, even if he regarded immortality as a myth pure and simple. And if he took it seriously, as many critics would maintain, not only does his systematic thinking on the subject seem to be sounder than the Christian, but his scheme of redemption appears more thoroughgoing and more finished.

Still, these are speculations to which there is no sure outcome. Perhaps, after all, we are dealing with an unresolved inconsistency in Plato's thought, in which the quantitative and the qualitative doctrines of immortality and the theories of reincarnation and personal survival lie side by side without attempt at reconciliation or synthesis. Or the case may well be

the not uncommon one of a current theological doctrine becoming embedded in a philosophic system to which it is superfluous, or even contradictory, without causing mental irritation, just as a foreign body may be encysted in animal tissue without inflaming it. In the circumstances, then, we had best be as undogmatic respecting the part played by immortality in the Platonic system, as we were regarding the status of the Ideas.

There is one point, however, that does emerge plainly enough from the discussion. Whatever we may think of her immortality, the soul is fast arriving in the society of philosophic principles, and is being recognized as an important scientific element in the Platonic system. She had begun life, perhaps, as an Orphic *religieuse*, and had played her metaphysical part in the *Phaedrus* and the myths in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, cloaked in the strikingly picturesque and mystical habit of the sect. But her duties were vital to Plato's thought, and she could not long delay putting off the veil of theology and poetry, and appearing in a more sober and matter-of-fact garb as an out-and-out scientific principle. A step in this direction had already been made in the *Republic*, when in the interests of moral and political theory she had been submitted to a dispassionate psychoanalysis which disclosed, side by side with a penchant for the Ideas, worldly inclinations and capacities that fitted her to be a link between the Forms and the realm of sense. And such a link was still missing in the Platonic system.

In the circumstances, two duties in particular devolved upon her. To begin with, Plato had sooner or later to assign a definite and acknowledged place to *mind* in his system. He had, of course, assumed its existence and its importance from the start, for without it he must have realized that there would have been no consciousness at all in the universe, no stream of sensation, no apprehension of meaning in the flux, no grasping of Forms or, for that matter, no philosophizing and no Plato. Besides, then, Being and Not-Being, and the world of Becoming hovering midway between them, there had always been implicitly present in his philosophy a fourth something—the thinking subject which reflected both the flux and the Ideas, the one with its dissolving experience of appearing and disap-



pearing particular things, the other with its vision of permanent types and laws and values. Heretofore he had, perhaps, with true Greek objectivity been more interested in investigating the nature of the known and of knowledge than in the problem of the knower. But the soul had always assumed the rôle without question, and it was inevitable that when the question did arise in explicit form, her part as the perceiving and thinking subject should be given a scientifically reasoned presentation. This we shall find to be the case in the later dialogues, to which we are about to turn.

Again, Plato was finding it more and more urgent as a cosmologist to explain the fact of motion in his world. But, when he faced the problem, the old spectre of dualism—of a world of essences set over against a world of sensible objects—beset him in a new form. When it came to accounting for force and energy, as when it came to explaining knowledge, his universe was in danger of falling into two halves equally impotent. The world of particulars could scarcely be the source of its own motion, since nothing in it was self-caused and everything in it came to a speedy end. Each new moment and event was forced into existence by a preceding one, and expended itself in bringing into being the next. In the flux, then, no trace of self-origination or self-maintenance could be found. On the other hand, the Forms from the side from which they had been hitherto approached gave, as Aristotle pointed out,<sup>38</sup> no sign of being creative agencies. Regarded metaphysically, as archetypes or models laid up in heaven, their very perfection—their exaltation above space and time, change and movement, and their remoteness from the processes of birth and death—made it difficult to think of them as working or exerting themselves in any way. The model does not copy itself, neither does the pattern cut the cloth. An outside agent, a modeller or a cutter, is necessary. And regarded as logical essences, the Forms might seem even more uncreative and dependent upon another principle for their enactment. For there is nothing in an essence as such either to necessitate or to preclude its embodiment. There is no *logical* reason why the unicorn should not have the same

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Met.*, I, 799a, 9 ff.

embodied existence as the lion. There is no *logical* reason why any possible form of existence should not be enacted in the sensible world. No one Form is more or less predisposed in itself to enactment than another. If logical reasons were also forces or causes, *all* kinds of logically possible existence would be realized and have prowled about somewhere in space and time from the beginning. The unicorn as well as the lion would ramp not only heraldically but in the African jungle.

It follows that either the reason for the concrete, living, moving, enacting aspect of the universe must be sought, not in the Forms, but in another principle, or else that the concept of the Ideas must be manipulated so as to account for the dynamic aspect of the world. In either case, however, the procedure would be the same. An intermediary concept was needed of a kind of reality that should combine the fixed, imperishable, and simple nature of the Forms with the variable, manifold, and flowing quality of the world of particulars. This principle must be living, moving, and teeming with repetition, but it had also to be as deathless and self-originating as the Forms, and so akin to them that it could transfuse them into its life-blood and set them in circulation in a medium of sense and multiplicity.

Once more Plato found what he wanted, ready at hand, in the Orphic *religieuse* as she stood. Even in her theological garb, her fitness for his purpose could not but be recognized. The soul was both in the world and yet not of it. Implicated in the flux and participant in its movement by virtue of her attachment to the senses and the body, she was also possessed of the divine spark, the mind, "the image of Dionysus," whose saving grace of knowledge and reason redeemed her from the flux and united her with the eternal. She might die like all things mortal, but unlike them she rose again from the dead. She was in time, she lasted, she went on, she moved; and still, in striking contrast to other moving and changing objects, she was indestructible and went on forever. To put it metaphysically, she partook of and fused the characteristics of both "being" and "becoming." Her capacity for knowledge already proved her ability to transform "becoming" into "being." Why, there-

fore, should she not also have the reverse capacity of rendering being in terms of becoming and translating the world of Forms into a world of sensible objects, the universal into the particular, the one into the many, eternity into time, "its moving image"? But if she could do that, she was precisely the self-originating, self-moving, and self-perpetuating source of all life and movement in the universe, of which Plato, as a scientist, was in search. We shall not be surprised, then, to find the soul figuring in the next chapter, not only as a thinking subject entertaining the Ideas in its thought, but also as a dynamic agent, a creative force, enacting them in a spatial and temporal medium and giving them multiple, recurrent embodiment in a physical world.



## CHAPTER X

### MORE CRITICAL DIFFICULTIES

#### I

THE so-called "critical" dialogues, it will be remembered, are variously regarded. By some critics they are hailed as the true Plato in contradistinction to Socrates, abandoning at last the exposition of his master's philosophy and turning to a statement of his own; by others they are thought to reveal merely the maturer philosopher developing more fully, and it may be with some change of mind, earlier teachings most of which are as essentially Platonic as the later. It is upon the latter assumption, as the more conservative and the more widely accepted, that we have so far proceeded and shall continue to proceed.

A considerable interval, we have also noted, separates the "critical" from the earlier dialogues. Outwardly given over to the teaching and administration of the Academy, inwardly, this interval must have been disturbed and lively enough. The doctrines put forward by Plato not only had provoked much opposition among the adherents of Heracleitus and Protagoras, and the Cynics and Cyrenaics, but also had met with misunderstanding and criticism within the Academy. Moreover, Plato's thought was itself a living and changing thing that must needs correct and elaborate itself. He owed, then, further discussion and formulation, if not to his adversaries, at any rate to himself.

The two dialogues by which the silence was first broken indicate the storm centre of the controversies in which he found himself involved. In the *Theaetetus* we find him returning to the question of the possibility of knowledge and rebutting, not only the Protagorean skepticism in the form in which Aristip-

pus and Antisthenes had fallen heir to it, but every theory short of his own. And in the *Parmenides* we see him apparently trying either to correct his own earlier doctrine or to clear up the misunderstandings his theory of Ideas had raised in the minds both of his foes and of his pupils. Although the *Theaetetus* is regarded by most critics as earlier than the *Parmenides*, and the questions raised by both are further developed in the *Sophist*, our narrative will perhaps run more smoothly if we consider the *Parmenides* first.

The *Parmenides* tells how the great Eleatic once visited Athens in his old age and how he conversed there with the youthful Socrates. The vigor with which Socrates is made to forestall the Aristotelian criticism of the Platonic Ideas has led a few critics to consider the dialogue spurious, and has impelled those who hold it genuine to ask just whom the young Socrates is supposed to represent. On this point there is considerable difference of opinion. By some, he is supposed to stand for Plato's own earlier doctrine of participation,<sup>1</sup> which is now being criticized and recanted under the influence, perhaps, of Megaric-Eleatic objections;<sup>2</sup> by others, to be some perverse pupil, it may be even Aristotle, or perhaps the Academy in general so far as it failed to understand its master's teachings.<sup>3</sup>

The argument opens *fortissimo*, intoning the familiar thesis that there is a world of absolute Forms, in which particular things "participate" and from which they draw through "participation" all their predicates. This evokes at once a series of discords. Pressed with respect to the extent of the world of Ideas, and having expanded it along lines that we have already traced, Socrates is asked whether it also includes Forms of such vile and paltry things as filth and hair. He shies, more than half inclined to balk altogether, only to be pulled up by Parmenides with the rebuke that when he is older and more of a philosopher he will not despise even the meanest things.<sup>4</sup> The reminder is of great importance, showing, as it does, that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 305 ff. Horn, *op. cit.*, I, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 253 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 68 ff.

<sup>4</sup> 130 C-E.

Plato is at last aware of a fatal inconsistency in the theory of Ideas to which hitherto he has apparently been blinded by his tendency to concentrate knowledge upon only so much of the truth as is also beautiful and good. The difficulty in a nutshell is this. The world of Ideas, if it is to satisfy our desire for knowledge, must dissatisfy our moral and aesthetic yearnings, and *vice versa*. For the world of Ideas embraced and treasured by science is far larger than that tolerated by our ideals of beauty and righteousness. Not only does science draw life from explaining that which it would be death to morals and aesthetics to justify, but the reasons it discovers for the evil and the ugly it considers no less real, no less valid, in a word, no less "good" from its point of view, than the reasons for the right and the beautiful. Conversely, the moral and the aesthetic interests are fastidious and selective. They cannot go the whole hog like truth. They are fatally poisoned by much that is meat for knowledge and science, and they violently reject as unfit for inclusion in a world perfect from their point of view many things that no complete and satisfactory description of Reality can omit from its account. In so far, then, as the Forms represent for Plato the ideals of our moral and aesthetic interests, they *cannot* include Forms of ugliness and vice; and yet, in so far as they represent the ideals of our scientific interests, they *must*.

As a result of this contradiction the trinity in unity of the beautiful, the good, and the true, which Plato was prone to find in the Idea as such, simply will not materialize, and it becomes impossible to effect a completely harmonious organization of all the Forms in a single, comprehensive Idea of the Good upon which all our interests converge. To know the truth, to be sure, is good; to be virtuous is good; to be caressed by beauty is good; and yet there is not one good but three goods. These different values or "goods" may meet and coincide in some of the Ideas, but not in all; and since beauty and moral goodness are not concentric or co-extensive with truth, or for that matter with each other, any Idea of a Good combining them all can never be entirely in focus. Vision of it will be like vision through a binocular the two eyes of which do



not pull together and cannot be wholly adjusted. The field seen from one point of view will not coalesce with the same field seen from another.

The alternative courses that Plato might have followed in the face of this dilemma are plain. Identifying the Forms fairly and squarely with the explanations of things in which science finds its consummation, he might have located their essential charm and goodness in their responsiveness to the passion for knowledge, and have regarded as accidental and secondary the virtue and the beauty upon which some of them were also complimented by our moral and aesthetic interests.<sup>5</sup> In that case, he would have been landed in naturalism, since the Forms which explained things would have been no better morally and aesthetically than the things that they explained.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, he might have insisted that the whole volume of Ideas was pre-eminently respectable from cover to cover, and fit for perusal by the puritan or the aesthete as well as by a curious and tolerant mind, and have explained away the unfortunate slips which are so frequent in the sensible copy as typographical errors grossly misrepresentative of the original text. Evil and ugliness were not manifestations of Form, they were rather indications of some sort of interference with its expression. But if this were so, Plato was committed to a thoroughgoing dualism. It was not merely that the Forms were reprinted and multigraphed in a sensible medium; they were blotched and their meaning was perverted in the process. There had to be, then, in the universe something morally and aesthetically opposed to the Forms as well as different from them, a veritable printer's devil of sorts—a coarseness in the paper that received their impress, a carelessness, a tendency to misprint—which messed the copy up.

But Plato made no such choice. The scientist in him, intent only upon an explanation of phenomena and contented with it, clung to one horn of the dilemma; the reformer and idealist, yearning for an order "higher" and "better" as well as less obscure than the world of sense, clung to the other. And his

<sup>5</sup> This, according to Stewart and Natorp, is what Plato did tend to do.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-303.

system as a whole, like one of those acrobats in the Minoan frescoes, balanced itself, head downwards, upon both. The passage we are considering voices the struggle of his mind to escape and surmount the relativity of human values in the vision of a world-order that transcends moral good and evil and accounts for both alike with rigid and mathematical impartiality. But very soon we shall find his heart once more uplifted to a Reality that is the author of the good only, and eager to expurgate from it Ideas of anything that might explain evil and ugliness. This latter, I think we may fairly say, is the predominant note of his philosophy. And that it was discordant with another no less important note his ear perceived rarely, and then only for a moment.

Plato's indifference to the dilemma and his insensitiveness to the discord are explicable enough. After all, some of the Ideas were good from all points of view, and all of the Ideas were good from some point of view. A portion of the field of the composite vision of truth, goodness, and beauty was actually in focus, and it was upon this portion that Plato's interest was concentrated, and within it that he located the main outlines of Reality. Moreover, because of a curious psychological ambiguity and confusion to which we are all prone in the use of the word "good," the perspective was subject to mirage and illusion. Anything that satisfies and seems good to one side of our nature kindles sympathetically the other sides and tends to take on values reflected from them. The moral desirability or the beauty of a belief, for example, predisposes us to feel it to be true. In like manner whatever satisfies the desire to know excites the sense of beauty and moral fitness, and may make even a disagreeable or undesirable truth ring with moral and aesthetic overtones. The solution of a mathematical problem may appeal not only to the scientist in us but to the artist as well. And on a fine night the Newtonian mechanics, or even the sheer physical immensity of the starry heavens, becomes invested with moral grandeur. For that matter, the pathologist will speak of a case of cancer that runs true to form as "fine" or "beautiful" or "splendid." Confront him with the full significance of his exclamations, and he will be the first to

disown them, pleading that he is venting a scientific enthusiasm only. But his ability to transfer the epithets from their original spheres and to use them, even superficially, in his own field without jarring his sense of congruity shows that his aesthetic and moral sensibilities have been really tickled by the scientific "goodness" of the case, and that his feeling has been one of general satisfaction. If, then, it sometimes occurred to Plato that because evil and ugly things were susceptible of perfectly good scientific explanations they ought to have perfectly good Forms, he may well have been blinded to the difficulties of the situation by this mirage of values reflected and transferred from the realms of beauty and moral rightness that hovers over even the cruelest truths. The delight of knowing all about hair and filth not only neutralized repugnance; it even aroused a kind of approbation, which brought, unless one was on the *qui vive*, their Ideas within the charmed inner circle of all-round perfection.<sup>7</sup>

But the difficulty bites even deeper than this. The conflict between the Forms that satisfy human science and those demanded by the love of human righteousness and beauty, is after all a tempest in a teapot—and, at that, merely the kind of tempest that can take place in our kind of teapot and no other. For our scientific hypotheses, no less than our moral and aesthetic standards, are the outcome of the local conditions and distinctive cast of our particular type of life. Peering through the eyes of a differently constituted organism and from a different position in time and space, the mind might conceive not only a different good but a different scientific truth. So far, then, we are dealing with a family squabble between purely human points of view no one of which transcends the system of co-ordinates arbitrarily determined by our lot in the universe.

If, however, science discovers even within the bounds of a distinctively human experience more Forms than are approved of by art and morals, so dialectic, it might seem, should take

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of the difficulties of the passage cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 256 ff.; Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 302 ff.; Horn, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76; Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-228.



into account in its speculations the existence, the possible enactment, and the possible goodness for some different style of creature, of Forms that outraged every pettily human ideal. Its end should be to shake off the provincialism that is imposed upon the mind by being born and brought up with our peculiar kind of body, passions, and parts. It must seek to discount the angle and the field of vision to which we are restricted by our particular standpoint, by imaging the existence, though it cannot experience the nature, of angles and fields that other standpoints might reveal. For if pure reason means anything, it means a power and an impulse in man to detach himself from the sensibilities, the preferences, and the ideals dictated by his special type of organism and his attachments to the world, and to see the universe, including himself, as it might appear to creatures whose natures and situations, and therefore whose aesthetic standards and scientific hypotheses, whose goods and whose Gods, were different from and even diametrically opposed to his own. Indeed, what is philosophy itself in its highest aspect but a freeing of the intellect from bondage to a particular time, place, environment, and nature? Its goal is a vision of all time and existence equally possible to all possible forms of thinking beings in all possible worlds, whatever the idiosyncrasies of their particular ways of living and of their peculiar loves and hates may be.

Such vision, it goes without saying, does not discourage any sort of creature from the realization of the specific nature and capacities with which it may find itself endowed. On the contrary, it sympathizes with all conceivable natures and makes no invidious distinctions among the infinite variety of antagonistic forms, moral, aesthetic, scientific, and religious that the expression of those natures may assume. Every kind of being is bidden dream the dreams, pursue the happiness, create and worship the Gods proper to its kind, provided simply in so doing it be not deluded into regarding its particular perspective as absolute, and into asserting the prevalence throughout the universe of ideals and values that, as a more disillusioned reflection shows, are good only for its special predicament and mirror only its own wants.

It is true that the philosophic impulse to rise above and discount the human point of view is part of that point of view, and in common with all our interests springs from our organic structure. With the rest of us it lives and loves, casts its vote, and pays its taxes at a given place in Reality under given conditions of life. Our philosophy, no less than our science, art, morals, and religion, is human, and human it must remain till the end. It is domiciled upon mother earth, and from her it draws the income that enables it to exist. But, unlike our moral and aesthetic interests, reason knows that it could live quite as happily anywhere else, and that it would feel equally at home and equally rich in organisms whose habits and sensibilities were wholly foreign to human ways. The love and enjoyment, then, of a detached and impartial vision which beholds and affirms the relative and accidental character of every particular system of spiritual co-ordinates, might seem, as Spinoza later pointed out, the one form of self-realization and happiness common to all mind, wherever and in whatever circumstances found. And here, if anywhere, we might argue, at the elevation of this serene and disinterested contemplation of all being, unclouded by purely human values, however dark or splendid, the Platonic Ideas should reveal themselves.

Plato, however, again falls between two stools of thought in this deeper conflict of the human with other possible points of view, just as he did in the lesser struggle of science *vs.* the moral interests within the distinctively human sphere. The man in him quite justifiably affirmed the validity in human life of the ideals proper to our special system of co-ordinates, and made of them the Ideas. And the enthusiasms of the artist, the moral reformer, and the religious devotee inevitably pressed him, on the one hand to ignore the existence and bearing upon his philosophy of any Forms other than those exemplified in human experience, and on the other to impose upon the entire universe as absolute—that is, as good for every type of being—the Forms that human experience did manifest and cherish. But at the same time, the philosopher in him, while reaffirming the authority of these Forms so far as we are concerned, seems to have been haunted by a doubt whether the whole structure

of Reality was cast in their mould alone. The "spectator of all time and existence" strained against the gravitational pull of our little earth and aspired to heights at which landscapes in the universe other than terrestrial disclosed themselves to a wider surmise. Could, after all, the nature and the God of things as they are be really figured out by formulating, however carefully, a vision of the nature and the God of things as we human beings would like to have them? This doubt and this question are perhaps the deepest, if not the immediately conscious inspiration of Parmenides' rebuke. And even if they do not suggest the reproof, they are directly suggested by it.

But we have devoted far more attention to the point than ever Plato does. The business in hand for him was the difficulties that beset the relation of the Forms to their sensible particulars. The crux of these difficulties his adversaries seem to have found in the doctrine of participation as it was developed in the *Phaedo*, for we find him criticizing and rejecting the doctrine himself in the crude metaphysical form in which his opponents understood it. [The particulars, he points out, cannot be said to partake of the Ideas, for that would mean either reduplicating the Form in its entirety in each one of its instances, or else parcelling it out in pieces or parts among individual objects—both of which alternatives are equally absurd. How, for example, can the same human nature be wholly in me and also wholly in you at the same time? But again, how can it be only partially in you and partially in me, if we are both wholly human. Moreover, and here Plato employs the famous "third man" argument originated by the Megaric School, the human beings and the human nature in which they participated would both participate in a further humanity (which made the Idea and the particular both *human*). And this humanity, along with human nature and human beings would in its turn participate in still a third common quality or Idea of human-ness, and so on *ad infinitum*. This objection, Plato hastens to point out, also overtakes the view that the particular is a copy of its Form and participates in it in the sense of resembling it. In that case, particulars would be like one another and belong to the same class by virtue of resembling the same standard pattern



or Form. But by the same token they could resemble their model Idea, only if both this Idea and themselves were like some further common pattern and standard of likeness, and so on *ad infinitum* again.<sup>8</sup>

Nor can we escape the difficulty by regarding the Forms as thoughts existing only in the individual soul, or, in other words, as purely subjective, mental concepts. To begin with, a thought gets its point from being about something. And since thinking is generalization, the something that it grasps, and is about, is the common characteristics or natures of things. Hence the Form, being just this common nature or type, would seem to be that which a thought is about rather than the thought itself. But if this be so, the Idea reverts to independent existence, and all the old difficulties of participation are revived.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, even if the Ideas were thoughts, these difficulties would persist. For the particular objects which participated in them would partake of the nature of thought, and would therefore themselves be thoughts. But if they were thoughts, either all objects would think, or else there would be thoughts that did no thinking and hence were devoid of thought—which is absurd.<sup>10</sup>

The question then of how sensible objects can participate in the Forms regarded as metaphysical entities remains unanswerable. And still other difficulties follow fast and furious. If the Forms have an existence of their own in and for themselves, they cannot exist in us. They must be outside and independent of our minds. But in that case their natures will be determined by what they are in themselves, not by the resemblances we discover in the sensible world and the generalizations we make regarding it. Nor will they necessarily answer to the names by which we call these generalizations. The general terms we use will apply only to our experience and hold true only of the world of sensible objects. They do not get at the Forms in themselves and describe their real natures. What the Ideas are really like we cannot find out. They are not what we are thinking about, and are not the objects of our so-called knowledge. They “have nothing to do with us, nor we with them;

<sup>8</sup> 131 A–133 A.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Raeder, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>10</sup> 132 B–C.

they are concerned with themselves only, and we with ourselves." <sup>11</sup> In short, it is no less impossible for our minds to entertain the Ideas, if the Ideas are things in themselves, than it is for material objects to embody and enact them.

Obviously, the dialogue continues, if the Ideas are to be known at all, they can only be known by an absolute knowledge which is in possession of absolute truth. God, for example, may know them. This sounds reasonable, but is it? What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and turn about is fair play. If our knowledge cannot reach the Forms in themselves, no more by the same token can an exact and absolute knowledge, acquainted as it is only with the Ideas as they are, know anything of the world of inexact and fallible human experience. To attribute, then, absolute knowledge to God is to cut him off from any knowledge or direction of us and our affairs. He will be confined to his proper, divine realm, just as we are to our human sphere. For the Forms are the Forms, the sensible world is the sensible world, and never the twain shall meet.<sup>12</sup>

Such, says Plato, speaking through Parmenides' lips, are only a few of the difficulties involved in supposing that there are Ideas, and that they are things-in-themselves. No wonder that their existence, or at any rate their relevance to knowledge will be denied. And yet the fact remains that without them there will be nothing in which the mind can come to rest, no reasoning to a conclusion, no philosophy. Is there, then, any way of looking into their natures more carefully and more deeply, and of redefining and reasserting them? Let us see.<sup>13</sup>

The means that Plato uses to clear up the misunderstandings of his critics, and bring back the Ideas in a tenable form, is not without humor. Deliberately, it would seem, taking off the paradoxes of Zeno, he puts into the mouth of Parmenides an appallingly long-winded and intricate argument, which completely demolishes, among other things, the Parmenidean teaching that Reality must be one, simple, and unchangeable. Into the labyrinthine windings of his reasoning we will venture only far enough to see how easily we might get lost in them. Pure Oneness, we are shown, can neither exist nor be even conceived.

<sup>11</sup> 134 A.<sup>12</sup> 133 B-134 E.<sup>13</sup> 135 A-D.

As an abstract idea it is a blank, of which nothing else, even existence, can be predicated without adding to, and therefore adulterating, its unadulterated unity. But if existence cannot be attributed to it, it cannot *be*. How then can it be One? <sup>14</sup> Pure multiplicity furthermore, it turns out, is in the same box. For the Many cannot be conceived except as *one* sum of many parts, each one of which is *one*. And this sum must be thought of as finite or limited, since it is a certain, definite sum or whole. But it must also be thought of as infinite, since the number of parts into which it can be divided is unlimited and hence cannot be computed. If, however, this sum is both finite and infinite, it will be both like and unlike itself, and the same as itself and different from itself, not to speak of other paradoxical consequences.<sup>15</sup> The ideas, then, of pure unity and pure plurality are both self-contradictory.

We fare even worse, naturally, if we think of just Oneness or just Manyness as really existing in and for themselves. If pure Unity is not only one, but also exists, then it is no longer pure Unity but a duality combining the two elements of Oneness and Existence. Moreover, this duality breeds with rabbit-like rapidity, since the two elements couple with one another and each produces a new duality, and the process continues without end. For example, the element of oneness in the original One *exists*, and the element of existence is *one*. So that either element of the One, like the One itself, is dual. And again the two factors of unity and being in either element are both of them one and existent. And their oneness *is*, and their being is *one*, and so on *ad infinitum*. The so-called one Reality, then, turns out to be an infinite plurality. And yet, on the other hand, if the One has existence and *is*, it must be something. But if it is something, it must have a definite nature or form. If it has a definite form, it must be definable, limited, finite. And a host of other self-contradictions follow.<sup>16</sup>

So, too, with a Reality that is a pure plurality without any oneness. If it has no unity of any sort, it cannot be a whole, since a totality is a One of sorts; and it cannot have parts, since parts are units. Number and multiplicity, moreover, in-

<sup>14</sup> 137 C-142 B.

<sup>15</sup> 157 B-159 B.

<sup>16</sup> 142 B-155 E.



volve units, so they could have no place in it. Nor could it have several characteristics or even one characteristic, for that would imply the presence of unity.<sup>17</sup> In short, a world that was merely a plurality to the exclusion of all unity would be as impossible a sort of being as one that was sheer unity to the complete exclusion of plurality.

Having already bewildered his readers almost beyond endurance, Plato proceeds to heap Ossa on Pelion by inverting the entire argument and pointing out the no less paradoxical results of assuming the non-existence or the inconceivability of either the One or the Many.<sup>18</sup> And then the dialogue ends suddenly, perhaps with malice aforethought, leaving everything in the air and everybody wondering whether he is standing on his head or his heels. Still, the conclusion to which we are expected to come when the vertigo is past is plain enough. The One cannot exist or be thought without the Many, the Many cannot exist or be thought without the One. Reality, however else we conceive it, must combine the two, must be one organized, self-contained whole, having a single nature or form; but at the same time this Unity is the totality and the organization of a vast and varied assemblage of many different facts and events.<sup>19</sup>

But the silence into which Plato retires so abruptly is pregnant with more than this. The excursion into the paradoxes of Eleatic and Megaric Reality was self-confessedly undertaken as a means of clearing up the real nature of the Forms and of their relations with one another and with the sensible world. And it was those who misunderstood and misrepresented the Platonic doctrine, apparently by giving it an Eleatic and Megaric twist, that the shoe was meant to pinch the hardest. They are as good as told outright that the Forms, and perhaps the notion of "participation," if properly grasped, are not touched by the objections they have urged. Get rid of the absurd notion that the Forms are Parmenidean or Euclidean Ones, Plato seems to be saying to his critics. Stop thinking of them

<sup>17</sup> 159 B-160 B.

<sup>18</sup> 160 B-166 C.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 272; Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81; Horn, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 129, 155.

as a set of absolutely pure, homogeneous, self-contained beings, each one of which is nothing but itself and exists in complete isolation from everything else. For that matter, the sooner you shake off the idea that such beings can exist at all, the better. Take your cue as to the true nature of the Forms from the way they work in the process of knowledge. There they give unity, and significance, and a name to groups of sensible particulars. They intersect and include, and help describe and define one another. And all together they enter into and constitute a single unified system, the Reality behind phenomena on discovering which the heart and mind of man are set. Subtract from the Idea of the whole the Forms of its parts and aspects, and there is nothing left. Nay more, try to isolate in your thought the barest and most abstract concept of unity from other logical categories like similarity and dissimilarity, identity and difference, motion and rest; and unity itself evaporates. There is no One, unless it be the Oneness of a Many. Again, dissociate any one of these categories or any one Form from the others or from the whole, and you draw a blank. There is no Many except as they are interwoven with one another and knit together into a One. In the same way, empty the Form of the particular things to which it refers, and try to regard it as another thing, a separate unit existing in itself apart from them, and it becomes void and without meaning. Or try to think of the particulars as a mere plurality without any unifying principle or nature shared in common, and they are reduced to a nameless chaos. What, for example, would the Form or nature of man amount to unless it were applicable to individual human beings. And what would it be apart from the other Ideas, of biped, and animal, and flesh, and blood, and tallness, and shortness, and the like, that include and intersect it and help make it what it is? Squeeze it out of its sensible particulars, distil it clear of all other essences, and bottle it up a thing apart, and it smells and tastes of nothing, not even of itself. And the same is true of any One that you try to conceive as merely One. Whatever kind of existence and unity, then, a Form may have, it must at least be such as to permit the Form to partake of other Ideas and enter into larger

systems without losing its identity, and to be present in its particulars without division or diminution of its essence. Not until you have got this through your heads can you begin to criticize the doctrine of Ideas intelligently.<sup>20</sup> And then the term "participation" proves not to be so senseless after all.

## II

The question of how the Ideas can "get together" both with each other and with their particulars is taken up in the next dialogue, the *Sophist*. But, as we have already said, we shall read that dialogue with less of a break if we approach it through the *Theaetetus*, to which we now return.

The scene of the *Theaetetus* is laid in the house of Euclid at Megara, where Plato, along with other refugees of the Socratic circle, had foregathered after the master's death. The dialogue itself, harking back to a still more distant past, purports to relate a conversation about the nature of knowledge once held by Socrates with the mathematician, Theodorus of Cyrene, and his young protégé, Theaetetus. Three definitions of knowledge are successively analyzed and rejected. The first is the familiar Protagorean doctrine, revived by both the Cynics and the Cyrenaics,<sup>21</sup> that knowledge is perception—a doctrine to which, Plato remarks, apparently with the Cyrenaic theory of sensation particularly in mind,<sup>22</sup> the teaching of Heracleitus naturally leads. For if all things are in flux, then perceiver and perceived, the knower and the known, are both nothing but motions which only become subject and object when collision between them occurs and a resultant flash of perception takes place. Obviously, then, if nothing is permanent there can be no permanent minds to do the knowing or things to be known, and knowledge itself will amount to no more than

<sup>20</sup> It is a question whether the One and the Many argument is meant to apply primarily to the relation of the Idea of the Good to the other Ideas, or to the relation of the category of Unity to the other categories, or also to the relation of the Form to its particulars. Cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Horn, *Platonstudien*, II, pp. 262-263.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Horn, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*; Gomperz, *op. cit.*, II, Bk. V, ch. 16, § 2.



a mere acquiescence in what seems true from moment to moment.<sup>23</sup>

But this view of knowledge, Plato continues, is untenable. That it renders it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish waking from dreaming, delirium and madness from sanity; that it arbitrarily makes the experience of the individual *man*, rather than that of the pig or the baboon, the measure of truth, and as arbitrarily singles out Protagoras from other individual men as superior in wisdom and therefore more of a measure—are perhaps superficial objections, which, for all their impressiveness and seeming cogency, do not really disprove the relativity of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> More serious is the fact that if we take the Protagorean assertion literally we shall be obliged to say that we do not know what we only remember, since memory is not immediate perception.<sup>25</sup> But the crowning absurdity is this. In maintaining that what appears true to each man *is* true, Protagoras admits that all other opinions are as good as his own. To admit, however, that the opinions of his opponents are true is to concede that his own are false. Moreover, if he really had the courage of his convictions he would not pretend to teach. By setting himself up as an instructor he admits “one man to be wiser than another, and that the wiser is a measure.” For that matter, men are accustomed to seek and even pay through the nose for expert advice—Protagoras’ for example—and to defer to it as containing a larger measure of truth than they themselves possess. In a word, Protagoras is refuted not only by his own logic but by his own practice.<sup>26</sup>

The Heracleitean teaching, too, instead of supporting the doctrine that knowledge is perception, really cuts the ground from beneath its feet. For if, as the theory demands, there is incessant change not only of place but of quality, there can never be any recognition or fixation of a quality as such. Noth-

<sup>23</sup> Theaetetus, 152–157 C, *cf.* 182 B. For Plato’s distinction between locomotion and alteration in the course of the argument, and for the weakness of his view that motion must include both kinds of change *cf.* Raeder, *op. cit.*, p. 285; Gomperz, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> 157 C–163 A.

<sup>25</sup> 163 A–164 B.

<sup>26</sup> 164 B–179 A.

ing is ever to be caught standing still and being something. But if we cannot arrest and detain a thing long enough to tell what it is, we cannot be said even to perceive it. Sensation itself becomes impossible, and so-called perception might as well be called non-perception. As for any knowledge founded on such shiftiness, we can no more define what it is than what it is not. "Every answer upon every subject will be equally right," and, as Plato's first teacher Cratylus had pointed out, words will be meaningless and should not be spoken.<sup>27</sup>

We may also, Plato adds, approach the matter from another angle. If the mere having of sensations is all there is to perception, how do the reports of our different senses ever become associated and referred to the same object? How, to choose a modern example, are we able at a concert to link the sight of the musicians with the sound of their playing? The eye gives us one lot of sensations, the ear another, but since the eye is unconscious of the existence of sounds, and the ear of sights, neither of them can combine the two. There must, then, be something more to perception, something *by* which things are perceived *through* the sense organs as instruments.

Again, when we perceive, we are immediately aware of likeness and unlikeness, sameness and difference, unity and plurality, being and not-being, and it is the application of these categories, or things shared in common, to the data of sense that transforms the raw material of perception into knowledge. But these categories are not themselves seen, heard, smelt, tasted, or felt. The cataloguing, like the associating, has to be done by something other than the sense-organs. What then is this something?

In answer, Plato fulfils one of the predictions we made at the end of the last chapter, and introduces the soul as the permanent perceiving and knowing subject. The data with which she works, to be sure, come to her by way of the bodily organs, but she possesses an inner structure or instrument of her own—the mind's eye, as we might say—by which she perceives what is universal and common in them. And it is from the possession and use of this spiritual organ of vision in

<sup>27</sup> 179 A-183 B.

combination with the reports of the senses that knowledge flows.<sup>28</sup>

But our difficulties are by no means over. We see, indeed, that knowledge originates not in the senses but in the perceiving subject, the soul, and we are prepared for a new definition of it. *Knowledge*, we are now told, *is true opinion*. This definition, however, as Plato points out, involves us at once in a most baffling philosophic question—that of the possibility of error. How can we have a false opinion? Error cannot arise from a confusion in our thoughts, for we cannot mistake this thought for that, or what we think we do know for what we think we do not. In a word, we cannot hold an opinion and at the same time hold it to be false. Nor can error arise from mistaking the non-existent for the existent, or one object for another. The non-existent is nothing, and to think about nothing is to stop thinking—and mistaking. Similarly, I cannot confuse two objects, if both are present in my mind—the dog, for example, I take to be a dog with the cat I take to be a cat—and I certainly cannot confuse them if only one of them is there.<sup>29</sup>

Error, then, cannot lie in a confusion of one thought with another or of one percept with another, since these are always clearly what they are. May it not, however, arise in the process of cataloguing things under concepts, and consist in assigning some novel or even some familiar datum of sense to the wrong class? For example, the mind may be likened to a wax tablet upon which our perceptions are impressed. In the wise man the wax is of such good quality that it takes and holds deep impressions—tenacious memories as it were—into which incoming percepts of the same sort are immediately and correctly fitted. In inferior minds, however, owing to the faultiness of the wax the memory images may be so blurred and shapeless that the incoming sense-data are wrongly identified and assigned.

Still, there are such things as errors of pure thought where there is no perception. We may add the number five and the number seven together and hold the false opinion that the result is eleven instead of twelve. The wax tablet illustration, then,

<sup>28</sup> 183 B–187 A.

<sup>29</sup> 187 A–191 A.



will not work, and our attempt to explain false opinion as wholly a misrelating of sense and thought has failed. What are we to do? <sup>30</sup>

Perhaps, the argument continues, the difficulty may be overcome if we distinguish between *having* and *holding* opinions, and to that end think of the mind as a great bird-cage in which knowledge of all sorts, captured and stored up through years of experience, is flying about. This knowledge we *have*, or possess latently. But the specific act of *holding* a true opinion about a thing, or, in other words, *knowing* it, means utilizing with respect to it the information we possess. It means reaching into the bird-cage and catching hold of those items of knowledge that suit and explain the situation in question. Now, may not error consist in seizing the wrong bird in the shape of some unsuitable item—the number eleven for example, instead of twelve, to size up the situation  $7 + 5$ ?

But can the exchange of one bit of real knowledge for another ever become false opinion? And how can we mistake one item for another? To say that there are also forms of ignorance flying about, which we grasp under the impression that they are knowledge, does not help. It is as impossible to mistake that of which we know ourselves to be ignorant for that which we know that we know, as it is to confuse one thing that we know with another.<sup>31</sup>

Apart, however, from the perplexities of accounting for error, the theory that knowledge is true opinion is faced with another difficulty. We may hold a true opinion by chance or luck, without having any grounds for it. Judges, Socrates observes maliciously, are frequently persuaded by specious oratory into delivering opinions that, for all their lack of a sound basis, happen themselves to be perfectly sound. Such opinions may be right although they involve no knowledge of the case whatsoever.<sup>32</sup> This difficulty provokes a new definition. May we not, asks Theaetetus, describe knowledge as *true opinion for which reasonable grounds can be given*? But another difficulty at once arises. Can there be any such thing as a reasonable ground? Grounds are simple and unanalyzable, like the sounds

<sup>30</sup> 191 A–196 C.

<sup>31</sup> 196 C–200 C.

<sup>32</sup> 200 D–201 D.

or letters in a syllable. They are simply there—final, unescapable data behind which we cannot go. But the process of reasoning is synthetic. Knowledge combines, puts two and two together, and its object is complex, like the syllable which the letters form. We are confronted, then, with the paradox that the elements upon which a rational explanation is based are themselves inexplicable, and that the grounds of knowledge cannot themselves be further explored, defined, and known. But how can we know the whole if the parts are unknowable? Moreover, the whole, being more than the sum of its parts, is itself in a sense an irreducible unit, and in so far as it is that, it cannot be analyzed and explained. And yet the fact remains that not only do we feel we *know* such simple elements as the letters in the syllable, but also that in learning we always begin with them as the *more* knowable.<sup>33</sup>

Again, what do we mean by the process of reasoning and explanation? It is more than finding words to express our thoughts, and it is more than rattling off the names of the parts of which a thing is composed, as Antisthenes implied. We may do that without *knowing* what we are talking about. Nor can explaining lie in stating the distinctive characteristics of a thing which mark it off from everything else. Such discrimination is implied in the mere rightness of an opinion, and it also implies that we recognize and therefore already *know* the distinctive marks of the object in question. We find ourselves, therefore, merely defining knowledge in terms of itself.<sup>34</sup>

The *Theaetetus* ends like the *Parmenides*, in the air, and as Plato himself says, negatively. We have discovered, not what knowledge is, but what it is not. At the same time, as in the *Parmenides*, the inference we are intended to draw is plain. It is hinted at in a digression into the nature of the consolations of philosophy,<sup>35</sup> in a passage that bids us fly away from earth and its evils to heaven and become like God.<sup>36</sup> This flight, we may gather, is not merely a moral but an intellectual process. Knowledge, like salvation, can only come through transcending the world of sense. Reasoning consists in discovering and grasping the Forms, the eternal types, and laws,

<sup>33</sup> 201 D–206 B.<sup>34</sup> 206 B–210 D.<sup>35</sup> 172 D–177 C.<sup>36</sup> 176 A–177 A.

and values, that persist and hold good forever in the flux of experience. Without the Ideas, we could not extract any meaning from the world of sense, have any true opinions, or give any rational grounds for believing anything. In a word, without the Ideas, knowledge would be impossible.<sup>37</sup>

But it is not only the problem of knowledge that receives no explicit solution in the *Theaetetus*. Its Siamese twin, the question of the possibility and origin of error is also left crying for an answer. To the quieting of this difficulty Plato addresses himself in the *Sophist*. Complete and speedy relief, however, involves recourse to metaphysics as well as logic. And the further effects of this metaphysics upon the nature of Reality and the status of the Ideas prove to be of great interest in supplementing the treatment discussed in the *Parmenides*.

### III

In the *Sophist* the dramatic manipulation and literary charm that mark the earlier works and linger even in the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides* disappear entirely, and we are confronted with a rather dry and technical discussion whose argument and movement are but thinly cloaked by the dialogue form and are, if anything, impeded by it. There is no scenery and no stage. The characters of the *Theaetetus* merely reassemble, bringing with them an Eleatic stranger to bear the brunt of the conversation.

The problem of the nature and possibility of false opinion and error is not broached at once, but is prefaced by a leading question as to the distinguishing marks of sophistry. Plato applies to the answer a logical or dialectical method that seems to have originated with him, or in the Academy—the method of definition by *division*. This method, which was of great importance for the future development of logic and science,<sup>38</sup> consists in taking some wider class to which the object we wish to define indisputably belongs, and then encircling and closing in upon our quarry by a series of more and more specific determinations, till finally it is cornered and run to earth in the

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Raeder, *op. cit.*, p. 193; Horn, *op. cit.*, pp. 259 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Plato*, pp. 376 ff.



particular, distinctive character that sets it apart from all else. For instance, to take Plato's own example, angling is an art, and the angler is therefore, broadly speaking, an artist of sorts. His art is acquisitive rather than productive, acquires by conquest rather than by exchange, and conquers by craft rather than by force. His art, then, is the art of hunting. But he hunts animals rather than inanimate objects, and aquatic animals or fish rather than any others. These, however, he hunts with hooks or spears rather than by nets—which differentiates him from fishermen in general. And so we find out how to define the angler.<sup>39</sup>

Apply this method now to the Sophist. He, too, is an artist, and a hunter. But he hunts land animals, not fish, and tame land animals rather than wild, and of these particularly man. Him he hunts, not by force, but by persuasion, and by private persuasion rather than public, and for gain rather than for love. He is, therefore, a chaser of wealth and position. If we approach him from other angles, using the same method of determination, we can also pin him down to being a huckster of ready-made intellectual wares, and a professional arguer and self-styled educator, who succeeds because of his talent for making appearances look like realities and false opinions seem true. This definition, however, lands us in unspeakable difficulties. As an artist in illusion, the Sophist would seem to convince people that what *is* is not, and that what is not *is*. For a proposition, if it is false, must assert the existence of the non-existent, the being of not-being, and *vice versa*. But how can we predicate not-being of any existent thing or things? That would be a contradiction in terms. Moreover, not-being is nothing, and to predicate it is equivalent to saying and thinking nothing. Nor can anything be predicated of it—not even unity or plurality. The very word is a self-contradiction, since the “not” nullifies the “being.” The Sophist, then, would appear to be trapped. For in seeking to create illusions and make the false look true, he is attempting the impossible feat of palming off on us something that is really nothing. He is predicating being of not-being. And yet, the moment we try

<sup>39</sup> 218 E-221 A.

to show him up, we, too, find ourselves in the same fix. We cannot expose or even admit the falsity of his opinions without maintaining that falsehood exists. And "in maintaining this, we are compelled over and over again to assert the being of not-being which we admitted just now to be an utter impossibility."<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, then, we must either throw up the sponge and deny the possibility of false opinion and of sophistry, or else we must see if there is not some sense in which we can consistently say that not-being is and that being is not. To the latter task Plato now applies himself. It is best undertaken, he feels, by investigating in the first place what we mean by "existence" or "being." Once we have determined this, we shall be in a better position to understand the true significance of negation. The earlier philosophers, we are told, do not throw much light on the subject. They used the term uncritically, assuming the "being" of their first principle or principles, without asking what the word implied. And the Eleatics have not helped matters by using it interchangeably with terms like "unity" and "wholeness." Confusion, moreover, becomes worse confounded, as Plato points out, when we turn to the dispute going on between the materialists and the "friends of the Ideas."<sup>41</sup> The one will not hear of attributing existence to anything but sensible, tangible bodies; the other, on the contrary, maintain that the material world is mere "becoming" and motion, and

<sup>40</sup> 241 B.

<sup>41</sup> There is great diversity of opinion as to whom Plato is referring. The "materialists" are variously understood as (1) the Heracliteans and perhaps Antisthenes (Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-327); (2) the Cynics generally (Natorp, *op. cit.*, p. 280); Melissus, who gave a materialistic twist to Eleatic doctrine (Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 279); (3) the Atomists (Gomperz, *op. cit.*, II, Bk. V, ch. 17, § 2); (4) the hard-headed, materialistically minded "man in the street" (Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 384-385. Cf. Horn, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 318-319). Again, the "friends of the Ideas" are understood to be (1) Plato himself in the earlier doctrine of the Ideas set forth in the *Republic* and now recanted (Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 328 ff.); (2) Plato and the Platonists slyly criticizing their own doctrines (Gomperz, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*); (3) those generally who believe in separate Ideas (Horn, *op. cit.*, II, p. 320); (4) the later Pythagoreans (Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-280; Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 385-386); (5) Plato's pupils in the Academy who misunderstood him and regarded the Ideas as metaphysical substances (Natorp, *op. cit.*, p. 284; Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 87, note).

that true *being* is to be found only in "intelligible and incorporeal Ideas."<sup>42</sup>

Darkness, it is said, is deepest before dawn, and this proves true in the present case. The very extremity in which we find ourselves gives us the clue for escape. The "materialists," the dialogue continues, cannot be right, for if they were, we should be obliged to deny existence to the soul—that is, to life, and sensation, and thinking. The soul, to be sure, might possibly be regarded as material, but the moral and mental qualities that characterize her activities certainly cannot. And yet, virtues like justice and wisdom certainly exist, else the soul could not possess them. This the more moderate materialists would probably admit, in which case they would doubtless assent to a wider definition of "being," and be willing to attribute real existence to anything, material or immaterial, that possessed the power of affecting or being affected by something else. The "friends of the Ideas," however, would resist such a definition. They would distinguish sharply between the flux, in which our body is immersed, and the realm of true being in which the soul through her power of knowledge somehow participates, and would confine acting and being acted upon to the flux alone. Still, they must admit that when we think, not only is the soul active, but also Reality, which we are thinking about and knowing, is being acted upon. So in the end, they, too, would be obliged to accept the new definition.<sup>43</sup>

This definition, however, would seem to be involved in a pair of hopeless contradictions. In so far as Reality contains soul and mind and life, it must be an active, moving sort of being. In so far as it contains sameness and fixity, which knowledge demands of its objects, and without which neither it nor they could exist, it is at rest. Motion and rest, then, both exist in Reality. And yet, since the real existence of motion cancels that of rest and *vice versa*, it would seem as if any Reality that could contain them both must be a third thing different from both of them. But if Being is something different from rest and different from motion, it will itself be neither in motion nor at rest—which is absurd.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> 241 B–246 C.

<sup>43</sup> 246 C–248 E.

<sup>44</sup> 248 E–251 A.



The answer now flashes upon us. There may be different kinds of being, all of which equally exist. Some of these kinds, to be sure, will not mix, like rest and motion, for example. But this does not mean that no kind of being can be predicated of another—a view maintained, as we have seen, by the Cynics. Many sorts of being, or in other words, Forms, can and do overlap and include one another. Thus, the Forms of a host of colors, and shapes, and sizes, and virtues, and vices, all “get together” without quarrelling in the Form of man. The situation is like that of letters or musical notes. They cannot be combined indiscriminately if we are to have words or harmonies, but that is not to say they cannot be combined at all. It is the business of the grammarian or musician to find out what combinations do make sense or music. In like manner it is the philosopher’s job to discover what Forms do go together and are capable of entering into larger unities or of being subdivided in certain ways. The result will be a vision of “one Form pervading a scattered multitude, and many different Forms contained under one higher Form; and again, one Form knit together into a single whole, and pervading many such wholes, and many Forms existing only in separation and isolation.”<sup>45</sup>

Out of this vision emerge certain broad categories or lines of intercommunication. We already have *being*, which can be both in motion and at rest, and *rest* and *motion*, which exclude each other, but are yet included in *being*. These three categories or Forms, however, are distinct. *Motion* and *rest* exclude one another, and though *being* includes them both, it is identical with neither of them. They are then all *different* from one another, and hence partake of the nature of *difference*, or “the Other,” as Plato calls it. Nevertheless, they are self-identical, always the *same* Forms, and therefore also participate in the nature of “the Same.” Thus we have two new, irreducible principles added to the first three, and get as a result five general categories or Forms that the mind cannot do without in its thinking—Existence, Motion or Change, Rest or Fixity, Sameness, and Difference. And yet, in a sense,

<sup>45</sup> 251 A–253 D.

each one of these categories *is not*, since no one of them can be identified with any other. Motion for example *is not* rest. Nor is it the *same* as Rest, though it is the *same* as itself, nor *other* than itself, though *other* than Rest. It is not even the *same* as *being*, and in so far as it is *other* than *being* it must be not-being, and yet it exists.

We are at last hot on the scent of the meaning of not-being and the possibility of error, which we have been hunting for so long. They are beaten out of the bush by the category of *difference*. We now see that by "not-being" we do not mean absolute non-existence but merely difference from the predicate or object to which the particle "not" is applied. For instance, if I say "motion *is not* rest" I do not thereby exclude motion from the whole of existence, but simply from that portion of it which is at rest. Motion *is not*, only in the sense of not being something other than itself. So too, if I say a thing is not beautiful or not great, I mean that it is *other than* beautiful or *other than* great. But the other-than-beautiful, the non-beautiful, or the other-than-great, the non-great, are as real as the great and the beautiful. For that matter they comprise all forms of existence except beauty and greatness. Even if we make the extreme and seemingly paradoxical statement that motion and rest, sameness and difference, the beautiful and the great are not being, I am after all only asserting that being cannot be defined in terms of those other Forms. "To be" is not necessarily "to move" or "to rest," "to be great" or "to be beautiful"; but "to move," and "to rest," etc., are not therefore vain sound and fury, signifying nothing. I am not opposing being to not-being but being to being. I am distinguishing existence in general from one of its specific forms, or one of these forms from another. Or, to put it in terms of logic, the opposition is not one of contraries but of contradictories. Rest, for example, is the contrary, or opposite, of motion. The two annihilate each other. But beauty or sameness are merely contradictories or negations of rest. They are not rest, but at the same time they can be present along with rest, or with motion. In the same way motion and rest, though they are not being, are its contradictories, not its contraries.

They can participate in or combine with it, although they are not it.

In short, the existence of the category of *difference* or *otherness* means that Reality includes and is composed of a variety of Forms. But, in its turn, the existence of multiplicity and variety means that "to be this" is the equivalent of, and is inseparable from, "not to be that." "Being and Otherness," then, "traverse all things and mutually interpenetrate." It is as much a part of Reality that motion should *not be* rest, as that rest should be rest, and motion, motion. Identity and difference are as necessarily not being as they are sameness and otherness. Range as we will through the universe, we shall always find that not being something else is the Siamese twin of being one's self, and that therefore all things "whether regarded individually or collectively, in many respects are, and in many respects are not."<sup>46</sup>

It makes, then, perfectly good sense to predicate "not-being" of "being," the Eleatics and the Sophists to the contrary, notwithstanding. For that matter, you cannot make sense—or a sentence—of any sort unless you actually do predicate of a thing something other than itself, something that it obviously is not. To say that different Forms do not mingle and unite is to deny the possibility of significant speech or thought. Discourse is saying something about something. Reduced to its simplest terms it must combine at least two things, a noun standing for an agent of some sort and a verb expressing an activity in which the agent is involved, even if that activity is no more than mere being what one is. Reciting strings of nouns, like "lion," "stag," "horse," or of verbs, as, for example, "walks," "runs," "sleeps," no more composes sentences than reciting jumbles of letters makes up words or combining Forms higgledy-piggledy gives rational concepts. A subject and a predicate are necessary.<sup>47</sup>

But, now, there are predicates and predicates, and two ways of asserting not-being of being. If I say of Theaetetus sitting here before me, "Theaetetus is sitting," I am predicating of him something that is not he, something that is not his being,

<sup>46</sup> 254 B-259 B.

<sup>47</sup> 259 B-262 E.



since "to be Theaetetus" and "to be sitting" are different. But at the same time I am predicating of him a state of being or Form which, though other than he, is really combined with him at the present moment. Subject and predicate, then, are entertained in my thought in the same way that they are actually enacted in the object of my thought. My mental combination reproduces the real combination, and therefore my sentence has the quality of *truth*.

Suppose, however, I say "Theaetetus, to whom I am now talking, is flying." This, too, is a perfectly good statement. It combines a noun and a verb. It says something. It predicates quite properly something of Theaetetus that is other than he, and that is not his being, since "to be Theaetetus" is as different from "to be flying" as it is from "to be sitting." Furthermore, the Form of relative not-being predicated is combinable with his being, since there is nothing in the idea of Theaetetus as such that logically excludes the idea of flying. For that matter, if the dialogue had taken place to-day, Theaetetus would more likely have been flying than sitting and talking with the Eleatic stranger. So far, then, we have a statement quite as sound and logical as the proposition "Theaetetus is sitting."

But, and there's the rub, this time my thought is attributing to the subject a predicate with which it is not actually united at the time I make the statement. I am combining with Theaetetus a Form that is not combined with him in his present state of being—a Form, indeed, that contradicts his condition here and now and is excluded from it, since at the moment he is *not* flying. In other words, I am no longer predicating not-being of being in the innocent and necessary sense of attributing to a thing qualities that are "other than" and therefore "not" itself, but still are Forms its being takes on. I now predicate of the thing qualities it does not possess, and attribute to it Forms "other than" itself that are also not Forms of its present mode of existence. I speak "of things which are not as if they were," and say "that things are real which are not." This, however, is to treat something *different* from the situation as if it were the *same* as the situation (thereby combining the

categories of *sameness* and *difference* which exclude each other). And it is to assert a non-existent combination of Forms as if it were existent (although "not" means "other than"). But if the essence of truth lies in combining Forms in thought and discourse as they are combined in reality, to combine them otherwise is other than true. Hence, when sameness is asserted as difference, and not-being as being, "such a combination of nouns and verbs is really and truly false discourse."<sup>48</sup>

The hunt is now at an end and we are in at the kill. We have discovered what error is, and how it is possible. And since opinion is merely a kind of silent affirmation or denial by the mind, and imagination but a union of sense and opinion, it follows that if statements can be false, opinions and images may likewise be so. We may properly then convict the Sophist of being an artist in false imagery. Furthermore, having so convicted him, we may revert to our old process of classification by division, and place him still more narrowly. Creation is of two sorts, human and divine. God alone creates natural objects and images, like the elements and animals, and their shadows and reflections. Men are engaged with artificial creations and with imitations. And some of their works are founded upon knowledge and science, and some upon ignorance, or, at the best, mere opinion. Again, some ignorance may be honest, but some may suspect and be ashamed of itself, and try to dissemble itself by pretending to knowledge and by involving others in self-contradiction through mere word-juggling. Ignorance of this sort is characteristic of sophistry.<sup>49</sup>

The *Sophist*, as we have just outlined it, bristles with interesting and important logical and metaphysical points. To logic it contributes not only the method of definition by division but a profound and thoroughgoing discussion of the nature of predication and of significant negative judgments, and the first sharp and argued distinction between the use of "is" and "is not" as copulas attributing or denying predicates to a

<sup>48</sup> 263 A-263 D. Cf. Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-337; Natorp, *op. cit.*, p. 294; Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-289.

<sup>49</sup> 263 D-268 D.

subject, and their use as affirmations or denials of existence.<sup>50</sup> Metaphysically considered, the dialogue is no less striking. The doctrine of the *Parmenides*, that the existence and unity of the Ideas must be so conceived as to allow them to partake of each other and enter into larger systems without losing their identity, is expanded and supplemented. We are given a detailed study of how and under what conditions inclusion and intersection are possible. In the course of this study we are introduced to five of the widest and highest categories, or ways of getting together, that determine the combination of the more specific Forms, govern the processes of thought, and constitute, so to speak, the bed-rock of Reality. The existence, it may be remembered, of these greatest, all inclusive Forms of community, had already been touched on in the *Theaetetus* in developing the theory of knowledge.<sup>51</sup>

But the metaphysical results are not confined to a more completely developed specification and interrelation of the Forms of true *being*. Light is also thrown on the realm of *becoming*, and of what has heretofore figured rather vaguely as *not-being*. We have seen the part played by the soul in the *Republic*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*, and in the *Theaetetus* with its tacit recognition of the fact that, in spite of Eleatic arguments to the contrary, life and change and activity are not illusory, but are part and parcel of Reality. This recognition now becomes explicit. It is impossible, we are told, to believe "that life and motion, and soul and mind are not present with perfect being," or that "being is devoid of life and mind and exists in awful unmeaningness, an everlasting fixture." Nay more, the power of acting and being acted upon, displayed both in the motion with which the soul inspires the corporeal world and in the intercourse of the soul with the Ideas in the incorporeal realm, might seem to be the common characteristic and uniting link of both worlds and the quality we have in mind when we "say of both of them that they are." In fact, we might confidently define *being* in dynamic terms as simple power.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 286 ff.; Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

<sup>51</sup> *Theaetetus*, 185.

<sup>52</sup> *Sophist*, 247 D-E.



And, as we have seen, the source and seat of power is the soul.

This belief in the reality of the changing, living aspect of the universe is confirmed by the exaltation of motion—the essence of the sensible world—to the position of one of the highest and most general Forms of pure being. In like manner, the argument in the *Parmenides* that the One is meaningless without the Many, and *vice versa*, is clinched by a similar exaltation of the category of *otherness* and by the assertion that *difference* is inseparable from *identity*. This, of course, may be applicable only to the relations of the Ideas to each other and to the Form of the Good, but it is hard to see why it should not also be pertinent to the relation that the sensible particulars bear to each other within the unity of the Idea. In that case the being of sensible objects would not be entirely exhausted by and confined to the fixed and invariable nature they share in common. Their separate individualities, their variations, and their differences from one another and from the standard Form would be as real as the universal and changeless types exemplified in their shifting, parti-colored lives. The one without the other would be meaningless. All in all, then, here, as in the *Parmenides*, it is not surprising that some critics have felt that Plato is protesting against those who would divide his single Reality into two contrasted worlds of Being and Becoming, having nothing in common, and opposed to each other as absolute truth to sheer falsehood and nonentity.<sup>53</sup>

If this be in Plato's mind, his logic of significant denial and of the meaning of the particle "not" illuminates the shadowy recesses of the principle of not-being, between which and the realm of true being, we are told in the *Republic*, the world of becoming hovers. If "not" does not indicate non-existence, but means merely "other than," the principle opposed to the absolute being of the Ideas, far from being blank nothingness, may simply stand for a different kind of being. The sensible world, then, is not a mixture of Reality with sheer unreality. That in it which is not Form is not therefore nothing at all. As a matter of fact, life, and mind, and soul, since they are not the

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Ideas, belong logically speaking in the sphere of not-being. But it is not of them that Plato is thinking. In any case they would not exhaust the realm of not-being, for to account for the sensible world something more is necessary than the Forms and an enacting principle or power. There must be a medium in which the Forms are enacted, something that gives "body" to them and to the activities of soul. In short there must be a *matter* of some sort if we are to have a corporeal world, and it is to this material principle, as distinguished both from the Forms and from soul, that Plato means the term "not-being" particularly to apply. This matter is no less existent than the Ideas. Just what it is we have not yet been told. But in a moment we shall find the question taken up in the *Timaeus*.

As it is, however, our universe is now pretty definitely outlined. On the one hand we have the System of Forms culminating in the Idea of the Good, on the other a material substratum in which that system is embodied. Between these two extremes we have a dynamic, enacting principle, *soul*, and a world of sensible objects which arises from the mixture of Form and Matter she effects. Or to run down the scale in order we have the Good, the Forms, Soul, the Sensible World, and Matter. But this is not quite all. Within the realm of Soul a division is foreshadowed and a new figure is appearing. Throughout the Dialogues Plato has constantly rejected blind necessity or chance as the reason for the existence of the sensible world or as characteristic of its behavior, and has as constantly invoked an intelligent cause acting in accordance with a purpose. Sometimes this cause is identified with the Idea of the Good,<sup>54</sup> sometimes it seems to be found in the Idea itself,<sup>55</sup> and sometimes in "God," a being who has from the beginning moved familiarly in Plato's pages, but mysteriously and vaguely, without metaphysical character or a definitely assigned place in the Platonic system. In the *Sophist*, however, an intelligent Creator is reaffirmed, is identified with God, and by implication, at least, is located in the life, soul, mind section of Being.<sup>56</sup> Coming events, as we shall soon see, are already casting their

<sup>54</sup> *Rep.*, 517-C.<sup>55</sup> *Phaedo*, 97 A-101 D.<sup>56</sup> *Sophist*, 265 C-E.

shadows beforehand.<sup>57</sup> But here again, as in the case of matter, we must wait till we come to the *Timaeus*.

Another fourfold scheme of Reality is set forth in the *Philebus*, a dialogue which we have already discussed in part in connection with Plato's ethics. There, we may remember, we have the Indeterminate, the Determinate, the Mixture of the two, and the Cause of the Mixture. The Indeterminate is the principle of the more or less, the higher and lower, the swift and slow, in a word, of the multiplicity and variation in the world.<sup>58</sup> The Determinate or "Limit" is the principle whose application to the indeterminate gives rise to a given, definable quality or quantity, and thus produces and maintains a persistent, namable state of being. And the result of this production—a process, incidentally, that is nothing but our familiar process of becoming<sup>59</sup>—is the third class, the Mixture, in which the wildness of the flux is tamed and transformed into a stable and orderly structure.<sup>60</sup> Finally, we are told, the Cause of the coming together of limit and the unlimited is not chance or unreason, but a "marvellous intelligence and wisdom," inherent in a supreme living soul, the mind and soul of Zeus.<sup>61</sup>

At first sight it looks as if this scheme might neatly cap, point by point, the system emerging in the *Sophist*. The Indeterminate would seem to coincide with the material principle, and the Determinate with the Ideas. The Mixture is the structure of the sensible world, and the Cause of the Mixture is God. And such an equivalence has been accepted by some critics.<sup>62</sup> But unfortunately for our peace of mind it is rejected by others, and we find ourselves in the midst of another Platonic controversy.<sup>63</sup> The Indeterminate, it is argued, cannot be confined to the material principle, or the Mixture to the sensible

<sup>57</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 289 ff.

<sup>58</sup> *Philebus*, 24 A ff., 26 A.

<sup>59</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>60</sup> *Philebus*, 25 D–26 D.

<sup>61</sup> *Philebus*, 28 C–30 D.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Zeller, *Plato*, p. 264, note 111, for references and discussion.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Robin, *La Place de la Physique dans la Philosophie de Platon*, p. 34; *Théorie Platonicienne*, p. 590; Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 ff.; Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 305 ff.; Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 320 ff.; Jackson, *Journal of Philosophy*, X, 253 ff.



order, since the Forms themselves reveal on closer examination a certain indefinite and mixed streak. They are simply what they are, and nothing else, to be sure; but at the same time, without losing their separate identities they can both partake somehow of one another's natures, and also exemplify the same definite character in a thousand individual objects. Human nature, for example, is displayed in all sorts and conditions of men. And although it is a different Form from that of the biped or the animal, with its own unalterable character and definition, it can nevertheless be logically subsumed under and partake of these other essences. The Forms, then, it is pointed out, are combinations of unity and plurality, definiteness and indefiniteness, and must be placed in the third or "mixed" class of being.

But there are also critics who, while arguing that the Forms are not to be identified with Limit, refuse to assign them to the mixed class. Some of these find the true home of the Ideas in the fourth division and regard them as the Causes of the Mixture,<sup>64</sup> whereas others have maintained that the fourfold scheme is not meant to include the Ideas, and that they stand outside of it altogether.<sup>65</sup> Again, just what Plato meant by the "intelligent cause" has been warmly debated. The divine nature and kingly mind and soul of Zeus is obviously mythological and not to be taken too literally.<sup>66</sup> But is it a figurative expression for a divine, creative power attributed to the Ideas, which form the sensible world in their own image?<sup>67</sup> Or does it symbolize pre-eminently the Idea of the Good considered impersonally as the rational nature and unity of the universe as a whole, which is expressed in a harmonious system of inter-related laws and forms and is enacted in a spatial and temporal medium through the agency of soul?<sup>68</sup> Or are we to credit Plato with a quasi-personal Creator, perhaps mystically identified with the Idea of the Good, or perhaps conceived as a sort of king of souls existing apart from all the Forms including

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Zeller, *Plato*, pp. 262 ff.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

<sup>66</sup> *Philebus*, 30 D.

<sup>67</sup> Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 267, note 114.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 99 ff.; Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 329 ff.

that of the Good, and looking to them for the inspiration and pattern of his work? <sup>69</sup> These are unsolved and perhaps insoluble problems. We shall find them raised even more sharply in the *Timaeus*, and we had best take our final leave of them there.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 416; Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 336, 337.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE IDEAS AS MATHEMATICAL FORMULAE

#### I

WE ought, it might seem, to pass at once to a discussion of the place of God in the Platonic system. But before doing so, one question remains to be considered, the discussion of which leaves us with probably the clearest and the least debatable impression to be carried away from the *Philebus*. Just what does Plato mean by "limit"? A suggestive answer is that he is seeking to express and explain the fact that in spite of being both "mixed up" with one another and included in one and the same rational world-order, the Forms have each a separate individuality and nature, determinable with absolute precision, which makes exact or "scientific" knowledge of them possible.<sup>1</sup> Thus, to choose a modern example, the astronomical Forms, or laws, of planetary motion that planets enclose equal areas in equal times, and that the squares of their periodic times are proportional to the cubes of their distances from the sun, are all "mixed up" with the law of gravitation and the laws of motion generally. But, at the same time, they can be stated without stating those other laws. They have their own separate and precise formulae, which are not the formulae of gravitation or of motion in general, and by these they are "limited" and determined to be the laws they are.

But how is such clear and distinct determination of each separate Form possible? The answer to this question gives us perhaps the key that best unlocks the dialogue—a key incidentally that we went so far as to finger and fit to the lock, when in discussing the ethics of the *Philebus* we remarked upon Plato's attempt to formulate the harmony of the moral life

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 ff.; Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 305 ff.; Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 370 ff.; Jackson, *Journal of Philosophy*, X, pp. 253 ff.; Robin, *Théorie Platonicienne*, p. 590.



as a "specifically determined mathematical ratio."<sup>2</sup> Absolute accuracy of definition—that is, precise *limitation*—is attainable only by the use of the mathematical method and in mathematical terms. The Forms, to fulfil the requirements of absolute determination, must be stated as *formulae*. To get at the real nature of a thing we must get the thing's measure in mathematical terms. Until we have found its *formula* we have not found its Form. Now Limit is just the principle of formulation. It sums up the concepts and processes of mathematics which enable us to weigh and measure and arrive at exact results. Without it the Forms could not be distinguished, nay, could not exist; for without precision and measurableness the universe would have no articulate structure and would offer no handhold to reason and science.

This reduction of Forms to formulae and this statement of the natures of things in mathematical equations, with which Plato has become so engrossed, are commonplaces of modern thought. It is his way of getting at the reduction of all qualitative to quantitative difference which, until very recently at least, has been the alpha and omega of modern science. To be sure, concepts like the quanta-theory and the theory of relativity have begun to shake our faith in the fixity and absoluteness of quantitative standards. But for all practical purposes measurement in quantitative terms may be regarded as yielding the maximum of precision, and as giving us the formula that is a thing's Form, scientifically considered. Take for example a familiar thing like water. Its nature or Platonic Idea is stated by the formula  $H_2O$ . The H and the O must be there to be sure, since other elements combined in the same proportion would give other substances. But once the elements in question are given, it is the 2 that is the determining factor, since any other proportion of hydrogen and oxygen would leave us, not with water but with something else. So far, then, as hydrogen and oxygen are concerned, the Form of water depends upon and is expressed by the 2. Again, the components of these elements are seemingly identical—qualitatively similar electrons (making due allowance for the quanta-theory again)

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

revolving about qualitatively similar nuclei. But the hydrogen atom has one electron, the oxygen, eight. Hence the difference between them is expressible purely as a difference of number, or, at the most, of number and geometrical arrangement. Their distinctive Forms, in other words, are stated as matters of arithmetic or geometry.

Again, passing to the less calculable aspects of Reality, we find that so far as they can be brought within the sphere of knowledge it is number that does the trick. They are really *understood* only to the extent that they are amenable to formulae. The economic activities of man can be partially expressed in equations and curves, and to that degree we have economic law and a science of economics. The stream of his consciousness has been in part subjected to measurement in psychological laws, and a monumental attempt has been made by the Italian scientist and mathematician, Pareto, to work out formulae that will cover all social activity.

Or take a so-called imponderable value like beauty. It is something felt, worshipped, yearned for—something that touches and satisfies other interests besides that of knowledge. But the soul is not content merely to experience the thrill of its caress and remain in the dark as to its true Form. Endowed as she is with the curiosity that is the beginning of wisdom, she desires like her namesake, Psyche, to see the figure of her beloved by the light of reason, revealed stark naked for what it really is. This she can only do by “figuring out” in numerical terms the mathematical proportions involved in the harmonies of sound and line that so charm the senses. We know, for instance, that the perfection of the Parthenon is in part conditioned by a proportion of length to breadth as 9 is to 4, and by a specific amount of curvature in the base on which it rests and in the entasis of its columns. It is these ratios that express, in part at least, the final formula or Form of architectural beauty, so far as that beauty can be made an object of reason and science—in other words, so far as it can be *known*, as well as felt or desired. Or finally, consider moral values. They, too, would be classed as “imponderable.” But they must have their weighable, accurately expressible side if

we are ever to *know* what the good really is, and have a scientific or rational ethics rather than one founded on emotion or mere say-so, unsupported by "good" reasons for the conduct prescribed. And here again the secret of the good life will be revealed in the mathematical *proportion* in which its ingredients are mixed—a proportion that we not so long ago found Plato trying to determine.

To put it in a nutshell, the limiting or determining principle which outlines the different Forms and gives each its specific or distinctive characteristics is number, and our slang phrase "I'll get your number," with which we threaten the discovery and exposure of the real truth about a thing, is excellent Platonism. And if this be what the *Philebus* is trying to express, its meaning is clear. Plato is simply grasping and stating in the terms at his command the ideal and method of all science and the *sine qua non* of the highest and soundest knowledge that reasoning can attain. From this vision of the possibilities of mathematics he has drawn a new inspiration regarding the Ideas. Or, at least he is now stressing aspects that heretofore have not been prominent.<sup>3</sup> It is not merely that ethics can be handled like geometry. All real being is determinable and describable with mathematical precision.

Plato's faith in mathematics is also prominent in the *Laws*, where astronomy seems to be regarded as the highest science.<sup>4</sup> In the *Epinomis* it is pushed to an extreme point. This dialogue, which carries on the thought of the *Laws*, has long been under suspicion, but there seems to be a strong tendency to-day to regard it as genuine.<sup>5</sup> Its subject is wisdom, the crowning science, which, through a process of elimination, is finally found in the knowledge of number. Such knowledge, we are told, is in very truth a gift from heaven, and is itself the giver of all good things to man and the indispensable condition of a godly, sober, and righteous life.<sup>6</sup> This, if genuine, is the last word we have of Plato's, and its exaltation of number, backed as it

<sup>3</sup> Raeder, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

<sup>4</sup> *Laws*, XII, 966 D-E.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 413 ff.; Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 497.

<sup>6</sup> *Epinomis*, 973 B-978 B.



is by the position assigned to mathematics in the *Laws*, has led some critics to ask whether he did not end by substituting higher mathematics for dialectic itself.<sup>7</sup>

## II

This seeming conviction that all Forms can be stated as mathematical formulae, nay must be so stated before the mind can sincerely say it really *knows*, would seem to throw considerable light upon Aristotle's assertion that Plato actually conceived the Forms themselves as numbers. It was not that there were Forms of numbers as well as of other things. The Forms of all things were essentially numerical—so that the same elements as established the nature of arithmetical and geometrical entities were also the ultimate Ideas or types to which cat, or dog, or table, or what not could be reduced. Plato also interposed between the Forms-as-numbers and the sensible world an "intermediate" world of so-called "mathematical objects," and held that whereas the mathematical numbers were capable of addition, the Idea-Numbers were not. Thus we seem to have two kinds or orders of numbers on our hands, one of which appears singularly incapable of dealing with even the simplest processes of arithmetic. And finally, we are told that Plato talked of an "indeterminate dyad" or duality (which Aristotle, and perhaps even Plato, is prone to confuse with the Number-Form of two<sup>8</sup>)—a principle of plurality, whose combination with unity produces the even numbers by multiplication, the odd when the number one interferes with and stops its propensity to multiply.<sup>9</sup>

That these are trustworthy statements of Plato's real teaching is generally conceded. But that Aristotle did not altogether understand what Plato was driving at, and misrepresented the doctrine in his criticisms of it, is also widely held.<sup>10</sup> The sub-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 412, 416, 418, but *cf.* to the contrary Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 497, 501.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 512.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* XIII, 1080b 11b 999a 9, I, 987b, 14, 1002a 15. Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 512.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Robin, *Théorie Platonicienne*, pp. 422 ff.; Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 399 ff.;

ject presents one of the most obscure and difficult of Platonic problems, and any adequate discussion of it would be too long and intricate and would lead us too far afield into the history of Greek mathematics. We have only time to record briefly a few suggestions made by modern scholars. In the first place, we are warned not to regard the doctrine that the Forms are numbers as a last-minute change or senile vagary of the Platonic philosophy. It was already being taught by Plato at the time Aristotle entered the Academy,<sup>11</sup> and it is all of one piece with the thought of the later dialogues, particularly with that of the *Philebus*.<sup>12</sup> What Plato was trying to do was to lay hold of the ultimate mathematical entities which must figure in all formulae and equations, and therefore in all Forms. Incidentally, he was on the road to the discoveries which have enabled modern mathematics to deal with "irrational numbers" and treat arithmetic and geometry as parallel aspects of a single science of number.<sup>13</sup> And, had algebra only been known in his day, he very likely would have found what he wanted in algebraic symbols and equations, which would have enabled him, as they have enabled modern thinkers, to push the reduction of all qualitative differences to differences of quantity to its veritable limit, and to construct even an algebra of logic by expressing purely logical relations in mathematical formulae.<sup>14</sup>

As it was, he did the best he could with the materials at his command. So far as he could see, the ultimate Ideas that gave definite existence to any and every Form whatsoever and made it a possible object of knowledge and science were essences such as oneness and twoness and threeness, circularity, triangularity, squareness, and the like. For example, the Form of the biped and of all Forms falling within it, including that of man, could

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Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 107 ff. But *cf.* also Jaeger, *Aristotles*, pp. 181 ff.; who thinks Aristotle's criticism is directed against misrepresentations of Plato by Speusippus and Xenocrates.

<sup>11</sup> *Cf.* Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 504; Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

<sup>12</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 118; Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 514.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 504, 505.

<sup>14</sup> *Cf.* Natorp, *op. cit.*, p. 420; also Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Robin, *op. cit.*, p. 586.

not exist were it not for twoness. Again, to go back to our old instance, without twoness the Form or nature of water,  $H_2O$ , would be impossible. And there could be no hydrogen, with its *one* electron *revolving* about a nucleus, unless oneness and circularity existed. So, too, there could be no such nature as oxygen, with its eight electrons, if there was no such thing as eightness. Nor could we construct an economic curve without curvature. Nay, more, if the beauty of the Parthenon be in part due to the fact that its length is to its breadth as 9 is to 4, then nineness and fourness, not to speak of an oblongness to lend itself to that proportion, are indispensable conditions of a formula or Form of beauty.

There is much then to be said for the position that the theory of Ideas as numbers is not an unforeseen twist in Plato's thought. It is rather a confirmation from Aristotle's lips of what we have already suspected to be the true meaning of the *Philebus*. It is no flight of fancy but the profoundest common sense. Plato has found at last the least common denominators of the whole formal side of Nature. The Ideas of number are the "limits" and determinants of every measure and every formula, but they are not limited and defined by anything beyond themselves. They are not subject to further formulation, and can be stated only in their own terms. For instance, if we are asked, "What is the essence of the number three?", we reply, "Threeness." But if we are then asked, "But what is the essence or nature of threeness?", we can only answer, "Just threeness and nothing else." So, too, circularity is the essence of the circle, but it is its own essence also. We have come to a full stop. The basic Forms, the ultimates of our thinking and the final frames of all existent things, are then actually Number-Forms,<sup>15</sup> or as we should perhaps say to-day, algebraic Forms. It is they that underlie and rationalize the idea and application of quantitative measurement, just as quantitative measurement, or in other words *formulae*, stated in terms of oneness and twoness, *a*-ness and *b*-ness, enables us to find definite Forms in an otherwise chaotic flux of unordered qualities. It can be said, then, that these supreme

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 507; Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 319.



Number-Ideas stand in much the same relation to the other more specific Ideas as the latter stand to their particular sensible instances.<sup>16</sup>

Now, paradoxical though it may seem at first sight, these Number-Ideas, for all that they are the basic Forms of mathematics, are really, as Plato pointed out, themselves not capable of mathematical manipulation. They cannot be added, subtracted, multiplied or divided.<sup>17</sup> Nor can they be superimposed or juxtaposed, intersected by or included in one another. This, however, is not so odd or startling as it appears. For example, although one circle can intersect another, it is obviously nonsense to talk of one circularity intersecting another circularity. For circularity is the Form or nature of all circles whatsoever, and there is only one such Form or nature. Or again, although we can inscribe a triangle in a circle, circularity, or the definition of a circle, does not therefore include triangularity or the definition of a triangle. Nor could triangularity be described by giving the definition of an angle thrice over. The same is true of the arithmetical Number-Forms. Although  $2+2$  or  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , it cannot be said that twoness, or the nature of the number two, multiplied by or added to another twoness gives us the nature or Form of the number four. In the first place there are not two twonesses to add or multiply. The number two has not two Forms but only one. As well speak of two human natures, or two essences of justice, or two laws of gravitation or acceleration, as of two concepts or definitions of two. And so with fourness. It is not the Form of the number two given twice, or the definition of three followed by that of one, or four statements of the nature of the number one. It has its own particular nature and specific definition, which cannot be mathematically compounded of or resolved into the definitions of anything else.

In other words, the Number-Forms are, strictly speaking, not mathematical entities at all. They are the logical essences

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 318; Robin, *op. cit.*, p. 590.

<sup>17</sup> The following discussion of "addible" and "unaddible" Numbers and of the Indeterminate Dyad is based upon Cook Wilson, *Classical Review*, Vol. XVIII (1904), pp. 247 ff.; Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 317 ff.; Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 503 ff.; Robin, *op. cit.*, pp. 585 ff.

or natures of these entities. Although the Forms of quantity, they are themselves not quantitative but qualitative, and, although the Ideas of number, they are not figures but abstract characters. In this respect, they are on a par with Forms like justice or tableness or what-it-is-to-be a man or a horse. In the heaven in which they dwell there is no entering into mathematical or quantitative marriages. It would be as absurd to say that fiveness is bigger or heavier than founness, as that the Idea of the elephant weighs more, or is more bulky, than the Idea of man. Threeness can be as little subtracted from founness, circularity can as little intersect circularity, as justice can be multiplied by the Form of the bed, or the nature of the quadruped be divided by or subtracted from the nature of the dog or the horse.

Such entities, to be sure, are in logical relation, and may be subsumed under and participate in one another. Thus we cannot define what-it-is-to-be a semi-circle or a segment without reference to the Idea of circularity, or what-it-is-to-be-one-half without reference to the Idea of the unit. But this is quite different from making the Idea of the semi-circle or the segment a mathematical fraction of circularity, or saying that it is lighter or that it occupies less space than the more inclusive Idea. So, here again, when Plato speaks of the Number-Forms as "unaddible," he is making the best of sense.

But if the processes of mathematics do not deal in things like threeness and circularity, what is their stock in trade? Certainly their business is not retail but wholesale. They are not concerned directly with trading in particular objects. If I add  $2+2$  it makes no difference to me whether I am adding two men to two men, or to two dogs or two tables. In any case  $2+2=4$ . Moreover, 1 man + 1 table + 1 good deed + 1 thing of beauty are not a mere enumeration of different articles. They add up, enter into a mathematical group, and form, in spite of their different species, a real arithmetical sum total. In other words, mathematics do not deal directly with two *this* or two *that*, or with this square or that circle. Their immediate concern is rather with "any old" square or "any old" two whatsoever. This "any old" two or square

is, to be sure, a generality of sorts. It is as applicable to all twos and squares and is as eternal and invariable as twoness or squareness. But at the same time it is not abstract but concrete. The mind handles it like an individual *thing*, not like a general concept or Idea. "Any old" two is still *a* two, not *the* two. "Any old" square is still *a* square, not *the* square. In dealing with things like a pair or a circle we are still dealing with a *particular* number or shape, even though we have not in mind any particular thing to which the number or the shape in question is referred. Our stock-in-trade, in short, is not Forms but figures.

Now these figures, unlike the Forms, can be added, subtracted, multiplied, divided, and the like. Any two  $+$  any two, or  $\times$  any two = four. Any circle can intersect another circle. Hence, besides the "unaddible" Number-Forms we have, as Plato says, a system of "addible" numbers, or of "mathematical objects" as he also calls them. Moreover, this system is, as he maintains, "intermediate" between the "unaddible" Ideal Numbers and the world of sensible objects. The Number-Forms make counting possible. It is the concrete objects that are counted. But it is the "addible" numbers—the mathematical entities of which our written figures and diagrams are the symbols—that do the counting. Twoness and two objects are linked together by the numeral 2. Between circularity and its concrete examples comes the circle of our geometry books, as fixed and as universal in its application as circularity, but unlike circularity divisible into segments and yearning to be squared.

For that matter, the "addible" numbers, which are the objects of mathematics, would seem even to mediate between the Ideal Numbers and the other Ideas, since Forms, although they cannot be integrated or said to be *mathematically* larger or smaller than one another, are nevertheless many and can be counted. There is a "number" of types and laws and values, just as there is a "number" of concrete objects. Though four statements of the definition of oneness do not make fourness, they do make 4.

We see now what Plato may have meant by distinguishing



two sorts of numbers, the ideal and the mathematical, and by contrasting them as respectively "unaddible" and "addible." And we can see what was in his mind when he described the "addible" mathematical numbers as existing "in between" the Number-Ideas and individual things. But we are confronted with a new difficulty. Although the Ideas of numbers and of geometrical figures cannot be derived from one another by mathematical manipulation, the numbers and figures themselves can. And obviously they come into being through some sort of extension or repetition of the number one or of the geometrical point. Two is two ones, three is three ones, four is four ones and so on. The point builds itself into the line. Lines somehow lay themselves down side by side to form planes, and planes place themselves against one another to form solids. But how can the number one be made to repeat itself and produce other numbers? How can a point be seduced into the reiteration necessary to generate a line? This is a crucial question with ramifications of vital importance. It asks not only how such fundamental operations of mathematics as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division can take place at all, but also how there can be a sensible world physically extended in space and time. And more generally speaking it raises the metaphysical problem of the possibility of deriving the Many from the One and relating them to it.

The answer to this question is by no means easy. We have already noted the metaphysical sterility of the concept of sheer unity. Mathematically considered it is no less barren. Taken alone, just a number one or a point cannot account for a number two or a line. It cannot reproduce by fission. It cannot fertilize itself. It must impregnate or be impregnated by something from without. But where is this something to be found? Plato answers, in the indeterminate dyad or duality, which he also significantly calls the great-and-the-small.

What, however, is in this name? It suggests to us, as it did to Aristotle, the nature of the number two, or twoness. And it must be said that Plato himself was probably not always clear on this point and left the way open for misunderstanding. But if this is what he really meant, the whole theory of num-

bers will prove as untenable as Aristotle thought it was, and the criticisms passed upon it in the *Metaphysics* are valid. For, as we have seen, the Forms of numbers are mathematically impotent, and the union of the concept of twoness with the number one would bear no fruit, nay, cannot take place. It would leave us, not with the number two but simply with the Form, twoness, *and*, or *plus*, the number one, uncombined and unintegrated. Indeed, it could not even do that, since, before we can even say *and* or *plus*, or have a copula of any sort, we must first have two things to unite and therefore the number two before us. To identify, then, the expandable and contractile nature of the indeterminate dyad with twoness would bring to naught what otherwise might well seem one of the highest and soundest flights of Plato's genius.

Confronted with this difficulty, and unwilling to believe Plato capable of so great a fall at so supreme a moment, modern critics have seen a great light. If only, we are told, we will identify the indeterminate dyad not with twoness but with *twiceness*, everything becomes relatively clear.<sup>18</sup> Twiceness is not a Number-Form any more than "twice" is a number. It is not a "limit," not a measure, not a quantitative determinant. It is not a stop-signal, which halts mathematical trafficking at definite numbers. It is rather the go-signal, expressive of *plus* and *minus*, *times* and *divided by*, *greater than*, and *smaller than*, which enables mathematics to proceed from number to number and establish measures and formulae.

Now *twiceness* can be applied to "any old" one with an immediate and fruitful result. It adds an *s* to it and puts it in the plural. Twice one is two *ones*, and we actually have the desired number two. And again combine twice with two and we have  $2 \times 2$  or  $2 + 2$  or 4; with four, and we have  $2 \times 4$  or 8.<sup>19</sup> By the agency of *twiceness*, then, all the even numbers may be generated from the number one and trace their descent back to it.

The derivation of the odd numbers was of course more com-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Cook Wilson, *loc. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> We must of course remember that Plato had not the Arabic system of numerals, and could not therefore express his thoughts by means of them.

plicated. Plato, we are told, said they resulted from the "equalizing" or "stabilizing" of the dyad or the-great-and-the-small by the number one. By this, it has been suggested, he means that the number one steps in, as it were, between two even numbers to form their arithmetical mean.<sup>20</sup> Thus if one steps in between two and four and constitutes their mean term we get three; if between six and eight, seven appears upon the scene. Here twiceness inverts itself and becomes a principle of division.  $6+8=14$ , and 14 combined with twiceness inverted, or one-halfness, gives 7.

Seen from this point of view, the indeterminate dyad may be regarded as an attempt to bring the mere and rather blank indeterminate or unlimited of the *Philebus* into the mathematical fold, and to define its function and place in the universe in mathematical terms. The formal side of existence had already been so treated, and it was necessary to subject also the non-formal, material, "not-being," aspect of Reality to the same process, if a mathematical formulation of all being was to become an accomplished fact.

Of great importance to this attempt, and most significant of the train of Plato's thought, was his redefinition of the indeterminate, not only as the dyad, but as the-great-and-the-small. The latter concept we are asked to regard as a method of dealing with the problems of indefinite divisibility, infinitesimals, and "irrational" numbers, and as evidence that Plato was on the road to the modern theory of the *continuum*, in which number is represented, not as a sequence of separate, hard-boiled units, but as a soft-boiled, continuous, unbroken flow from zero to infinity. And his geometry, it is further argued, was similarly oriented. He was getting away from the concept of the point as a unit that has position, and of the line as produced by a repetition or succession of such units—concepts originating in the attempt of the Pythagoreans to apply arithmetic to geometry, and apparently still held by some members of the Academy. The point was rather to be regarded as the "start of a line" which was generated not by repetition but by a process of continuous, creeping extension or "fluxion."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 512, 513.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 505 ff.



And this train of thought would inevitably lead to a consideration of the plane as generated, not by a re-laying, but by a dragging or a pushing of the line, and of the solid as built up out of the plane by projection rather than by superimposition. The final consequence of such a treatment of geometry would be that both it and arithmetic would flow together and merge in the concept of the *continuum*, on whose stream both are carried. Thus they would lose their distinct and sometimes apparently antagonistic characters, and might take on in Plato's eyes their very modern appearance of parallel aspects of a single science.

The indeterminate, so far as it is an element of the Forms themselves, is also susceptible of interpretation along these lines. Not only is it the condition of a plurality of Forms, but the multiplicity it gives rise to in the world of essences has a continuity not unlike that of numbers. So far as we reason closely and consecutively, we do not jump from Idea to Idea but glide from one to another without shock or jar through a continuous series of middle Forms or terms. And the logical method of definition by division, upon which Plato lays so much stress in the *Sophist*, is akin to the mathematical process of convergence upon an irrational number, like  $\sqrt{2}$  for example, by the use of continued fractions. By the segregation of more specific within more general Ideas we close in upon the specific Form by bracketing it, as it were, more and more narrowly, till we have excluded from it everything that is not its proper essence; just as we approximate to our irrational number by a progressive reduction of the values that are greater and smaller than the one in question.<sup>22</sup>

If the suggestion that in this doctrine of the indeterminate dyad Plato was reaching towards a concept of the *continuum* be correct, he had certainly gone very far towards finding a least common denominator for all the aspects of the non-formal, "not-being," material side of existence. "Fluxion" was already the principle of the flux, of movement, change, and becoming. It became now the principle also of numerical multiplicity and geometrical extension, and hence of the spread-out character

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 509 ff.

of phenomena and of their plurality in space. Moreover, since Plato in the *Timaeus* explicitly identifies the stuff of which things are made with pure space or extension, the solid, corporeal nature of the sensible world could also be reduced to it. Nay more, he had perhaps found a mathematical solution of the problem of evil—a problem which along with that of the nature of God was coming more and more to the fore in his mind—and could explain scientifically why the world of particular things *must* continually fail to enact the Forms perfectly. For it is in the nature of a *continuum* that numbers themselves shall be always in the making and never quite made, and shall approximate but never quite attain or keep their Forms. Thus the number two is never completely and unreservedly given over to twoness and nothing else. It is a passage, a transition, a looking backward and forward through a perspective of infinite gradations towards one and towards three. It can never be caught in the act of being wholly and merely an example of twoness. But if number, which is the most precise, the most abstract, the best, and the most ideal measure of quantity that we have, is in its very nature too changing and too fickle to cleave to any one Number-Form, and to that one only, then all quantitative existence, just by virtue of being quantitative, is doomed to imperfection. But more of the problem of evil anon.

## CHAPTER XII

### GOD AND MATTER

#### I

WE turn, at last, to Plato's theology. In the *Philebus*, as in the *Sophist*, "God" figures with some prominence and is spoken of as if he had a distinct being of his own quite apart from the Ideas. He is a soul, a mind, a purposive, creative agent endowed with a personality like our own and responsible for the ordering of the world after the pattern set by the Forms. The same tendency to personify the divine and to regard it as an independent metaphysical principle is to be found in the *Statesman*, and approaches its climax in the *Timaeus*. How far it is to be taken literally and as a final pronouncement is, and must remain, an open question. But it would seem to show at least that Plato is turning theological, is asking himself just what he does mean by the God whom heretofore he has left so ill-defined, and is experimenting in his own mind with the idea of a personal Deity intervening between the Ideas and the sensible world. That theology should appear tugging on the skirts of mathematics need not surprise us, since theology is, after all, an attempt to apply the mathematical method to God, and to make him intelligible and "scientific" by formulating clearly and precisely his nature and by determining exactly his relation to the rest of the universe.

In the *Laws*, the theological phase reaches its apex and apparently dominates Plato's metaphysical thinking to the exclusion of all else. Indeed, God seems to have ousted the Ideas altogether from their supremacy and to have overshadowed them so completely in Plato's mind that we have little or no mention of them. In almost Hebraic terms Plato dwells on his majesty and glory.<sup>1</sup> His existence as a universal

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 365.



Mind or Reason infusing and controlling all things is argued at length from the orderliness and rationality of Nature, and conversely the universality of his providential oversight and control is argued from his goodness and perfection.<sup>2</sup> From this also follows his trustworthiness, his justice, his advocacy of righteousness in men, his punishment of evil, and his incessant warfare against disorder and corruption in the world.<sup>3</sup> Nay more, to enforce an acceptance of these articles of belief Plato is willing to invoke the law and to go to extreme lengths, and the measures he advocates to exterminate heresy and the punishments he devises for it form one of the darkest corners in his philosophy.

But such a theology raises immediate problems. There is no relation more difficult to make intelligible and to formulate without absurdity than the relation of a good and powerful God to the imperfection of his handiwork. It raises at once the so-called problem of evil; the problem, that is, of explaining how a divinely created and governed universe can be so full of sin and suffering and go wrong in so many different ways. Than this there is no more insistent or baffling theological question. Plato had been by no means indifferent to it, but so far he had only half faced it. The more general aspects of imperfection, so far as they bothered him, he seems to have wished to refer to the inferior quality of the not-being side of the universe and let them go at that. And yet, when one came really to examine the Ideas and consider all their implications, there arose the disturbing suspicion, voiced in the *Parmenides*, that evil things had their Forms and were no less a manifestation of true being than the good. Obviously further meditation was necessary.

Again the more specific difficulty of sin and human suffering he had evaded, rather than met, by his picture of reincarnation and of the freedom from external compulsion enjoyed by the soul in picking out each successive existence. For in the same breath he had pointed out that her choice was determined for weal or woe by the nature of her former lives, as indeed it had to be if her sufferings here and now were to be explained and

2 899 D-905 D.

3 905 D-907 A.

justified as the wages of past sins. The shortcomings of these lives, to be sure, might be traced back to an original defect and weakness in the soul which caused her to fall in the first place from the presence of the Gods and the vision of the Ideas into the round of birth and rebirth. But who or what was responsible for that innate and primal flaw in her nature? God, it must seem on reflection, was by no means justified as yet.

We might expect, then, that in the general house-cleaning and tidying up of his system in the later dialogues the problem of evil would be aired. And so it is. In the *Statesman*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Laws* it appears and reappears, and a persistent effort is made to fix the responsibility for the imperfection of the sensible world. In the myth in the *Statesman*, for instance, we are told that once upon a time, in the golden age of Cronos, mankind instead of reproducing itself was continuously created by God directly from the earth as the need for new individuals arose. And God cared for men as a shepherd for his sheep. He also immediately superintended the running of the universe, which under his guidance revolved without aberration in the right direction. But in the fulness of time the divine pilot let go the helm and retired to the look-out. At that, the world, which in spite of its God-given orderly or rational structure was composed of an imperfect, intractable stuff and had a spontaneous tendency to move in a direction contrary to the good, necessarily reversed its revolution, and gradually became more and more irrational in its movements, till it was in danger of reverting to chaos. And mankind, bereft of the divine care and left like the universe to its own devices, well-nigh perished from the earth. Finally God had mercy, and taking the helm again restored the world to order. And the lesser Gods provided men with the primitive necessities and arts of life. But instead of growing out of the earth and being directly shepherded, we had henceforth to reproduce and look out for ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

The tale is a combination of Pythagorean imaginings and of ideas drawn from the old Greek accounts of creation, and the *Statesman* is adorned with it, it would seem, mainly to point the

<sup>4</sup> *Statesman*, 269 A-274 E.

political moral with which the dialogue is concerned.<sup>5</sup> Hence we are warned by one scholar against taking it in any way seriously.<sup>6</sup> But we are also told that it has a metaphysical as well as a political bearing. Some critics find it directly in line with the thought of the *Timaeus*.<sup>7</sup> Others see in the material principle of reverse and disorderly motion a development of the doctrine of the indeterminate in the *Philebus*, and regard the divine king and shepherd, the cause of all goodness, truth, and being, as an imaginative and personal rendering of limit or measure.<sup>8</sup> And still another suggests that the myth veils an attempt to explain the imperfection of man and the general tendency of the universe to balk at the rule of the good, and that it touches, like the myth of Er in the *Republic*, "upon the question of freedom and necessity both in relation to God and Nature."<sup>9</sup>

If we do then attribute some metaphysical significance to the myth—and it is difficult to feel that Plato's motive is entirely political—there would seem to be a definite attempt to throw the blame for evil upon an obstructive and disorderly material principle, not only metaphysically distinct from the Ideas, but "morally" opposed to them and to all they stand for. This attempt, we may note, is no more successful than that made in the *Republic* to clear God of responsibility for human suffering. It pictures him as omnipotent in the beginning and in full control of the situation, and fails to explain why he should have "let go" when everything was going so well. Indeed it cannot give any explanation that does not impugn either the divine power or the divine goodness. Either God *had* to let go, or he wanted to.

But this failure is beside our main point. In any case, granting metaphysical significance to the myth, we would seem to detect a fairly consistent progress of the concept of "not-being" in the *Sophist* through the indeterminate in the *Philebus* and the ground of non-purposive, necessary motion in the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 395, 396.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Adam, *Republic of Plato*, II, 295 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 335 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Jowett, *Plato*, Ed. 1892, Vol. IV, pp. 433, 434.



*Statesman*, towards the final appearance in the *Timaeus* of a full-fledged material principle. It is interesting, too, to note the emerging distinction between what we should roughly call teleological and mechanical motion, and to find Plato forced to recognize that there is a good deal of movement and occurrence in the universe that cannot be regarded as altogether inspired or directed by "a marvellous intelligence and wisdom." Moreover, we get a peep into a side-show of his thought and a glimpse of the growing asceticism and puritanism of his old age, so marked in the *Laws*, in his feeling that sexual reproduction is pretty much of a come-down from the method of individual creation from the earth—though it must be said that this feeling doubtless rests in part upon common-sense observation of the devil raised in human life by the presence of an instinct whose driving force and necessities of healthy satisfaction are so far in excess of the limits most compatible with ideal social organization.

## II

In the *Timaeus* all the actors in the Platonic drama—the Ideas, Soul, God, the Sensible World, Being, Becoming, Not-Being, the One and the Many, the Same and the Other, Limit and the Unlimited, the Purposive and the Necessary, Soul and Body, Mind and Matter, to mention the more prominent characters—appear together upon the stage to sing individually and in already familiar duets and trios the story of the creation of the universe and of man. Incidentally, the dialogue covers the field of the physical and the biological sciences as they were known to Plato, or perhaps, we should say, in so far as they lent themselves to his scheme. Much of it seems fantastic, and how far Plato himself meant it to be taken literally is a moot point among scholars. It had, however, a great influence upon the attempted revival and reinterpretation of Platonism some centuries later, and upon the early Christian theologians, who saw in it a divinely inspired foreshadowing of the Christian revelation.

The work, though written many years later than the *Republic*, purports to be an immediate continuation of its argu-

ment and begins with a recapitulation of the theory of the state. It is then suggested that many thousand years ago the Platonic ideal commonwealth was actually a going concern in an ancient Athens all record of which had been lost save in a tradition preserved by the Egyptian priesthood. This Athens, too, so the story ran, had saved the whole Mediterranean world from the attacks of a great island empire which at that time existed in the Atlantic just outside the Straits. Then there came a period of floods and earthquakes when the Athens of yore was swallowed up by the earth, and Atlantis, for so the empire in the western seas was called, was engulfed beneath the waves.<sup>10</sup> A more detailed description of the wonders, both military and civil, of these ancient rivals is given in the fragment of the *Critias* that has come down to us, and from this and the passages in the *Timaeus* have sprung the familiar legend of Atlantis and the controversy over the possible existence and submergence out in the Atlantic, once upon a time, of a lost continent and civilization.

From this excursion many thousand years into the past to a golden age of man it needs only another step to take us back to the creation of the human race and of the world in which man lives. Created the universe must have been, for its nature is sensible and physical and in a continual process of growth and decay, and only that which is immaterial, changeless, and perceived by reason alone can be uncreated and eternal. But creation implies a creator. There must, then, exist an agent by which all things were made. This agent is God.

The curtain now rises upon God confronted with an unformed chaos full of disorderly movement. Being good, he desired that the universe, also, should be as good as possible, and therefore chose for it the best of all models, the whole system of Forms, a system which is in itself a perfect organization or ideal living being. The order and beauty of the world, as well as the goodness of its creator, assure us that it is the copy of no imperfect original but of what is best and eternal.<sup>11</sup>

The work of creation proceeds from the top down, not from the bottom up. God did not first make the body of the world

<sup>10</sup> *Timaeus*, 21 E-25 D.

<sup>11</sup> 28 A-30 D.

and later infuse into it life and soul and intelligence. On the contrary he started by translating the Form of the world into the next highest terms, those of life and animated movement, and fashioned a world-soul within which he placed the material universe. This world-soul he made as follows. He took the Same and the Other, or in other words the principle of the indivisible and unchangeable Forms and the principle which "is divisible and has to do with material bodies," and compounded of them an essence. And this essence he remixed with the Same and the Other, making the "reluctant and unsociable" material element in it subservient to the formal. The resultant principle he then cut up and recombined according to certain laws of mathematical proportion and musical harmony, and eventually formed of it two hoops of movement placed one within the other at an angle and joined top and bottom upon a common axis. The outer circular movement, which is uniform and orderly and expresses the nature of the Same, is the movement of the fixed stars. The inner hoop of motion on the contrary, which betrays the nature of the Other, is divided into seven unequal circles, the seemingly irregular but in reality harmonious orbits and motions of the wandering stars or planets.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of the physical metaphors used by Plato, we must remember that so far we are dealing with a strictly immaterial kind of being—a spirit of life and activity prefiguring in itself the structure of the universe and ready to put that structure into effect as soon as the means of material expression are at hand. And in this design it is animated by the Ideas, to which the element of the Same and of Limit in its composition makes it akin. At the same time this principle is not absolutely pure "spirit." Its admixture with the element of the Other and the Indeterminate gives it a sort of spiritual body as well—a capacity, that is, for fusion with a material alloy and for precipitating sense-experience from the fusion. Still, the presence of the Same and of Limit in the world-soul, will introduce law and order into sensible experience and make it also intelligible. And the universe to which she imparts life and motion will be not only physical but rational.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 34 C-36 D.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 37-A-37 C.



Having thus created a kind of being spiritually tough and brawny enough to live in a physical universe and keep it in order, and at the same time brainy enough to run it intelligently and in the best possible way, God proceeded to fashion the material world itself, and to settle the world-soul in it and put her to work. With this in view he turned to the material principle which he found in a chaotic condition, full of disorderly, aimless, and unintelligible motion. Out there in the midst of the scrimmage, being winnowed and sifted and driven apart without rhyme or reason, and tending to gravitate towards positions determined, not by an intelligent purpose, but only by their own weight, he found the rudiments of the four elements, earth, water, air, and fire.<sup>14</sup> These he perfected—how, we shall see in a moment—and arranging them in the mathematical proportion of two means, water and air, to two extremes, earth and fire, he compounded the universe of them, compressing them in their entirety into that fairest of all forms, the sphere. The world-body thus fashioned had no need of external organs of sense, since there was nothing outside it to perceive, and, being endowed with the appropriate movement of revolution about its own centre, it would have found hands and feet superfluous. In the midst of this body, and at the same time diffused throughout it and enveloping it, he placed the world-soul. Together the soul and body of the universe are as complete an enactment as possible of the system of Forms, or Idea of the perfect living being, and may even be called a “blessed God.”<sup>15</sup>

The physical shape and structure of the world were now conformed, so far as the nature of matter and necessity would permit, to the Ideal. Seeing that what he had made was good and pleasing in his sight, God determined to improve it still further by giving to its moving and changing aspects what quality he could of the eternity of its pattern. To this end he created time, whose everlastingness is a moving image of eternity. Thus, when we speak of the eternal in terms of time, we speak of it as that which was, and is, and shall be. But in the eternal itself there is no “was” or “shall be.” It does not grow. It is never any younger, never any older. It has not become

<sup>14</sup> 52 E-53 C.

<sup>15</sup> 31 B-34 B.

in any past what it is, nor will it become so in any future. It simply *is* what it is. In becoming and change, on the other hand, there is no real "*is*," since that which is in change and movement can never be stopped in its ceaseless, unbroken flight from the past to the future. When we say then of any thing or movement in the flux that it *is*, we speak inaccurately. For its so-called "being" turns out to be not a state of rest, but the trajectory of a "becoming" in which no intermission between "was" and "shall be" is ever present.<sup>16</sup>

But the flow of time, if it is to be appreciable, has to be measured by sensible means. As markers God created the sun and the moon and the planets, and assigned to them the seven orbits into which the hoop of the Other was divided. These orbits, and the bodies carried in them, revolving as they do with different degrees of swiftness and in different and sometimes opposite directions, account for all the complexity of the movements of the heavens. The earth itself was set at, or near, the centre of the universe. Whether Plato looked upon the earth as stationary, or as revolving upon its axis, or as "moving to and fro" somewhat like a lion pacing up and down its cage, is a disputed point.<sup>17</sup> In any case, the compounding of all these movements makes the passage of time visible to us, and measurable in such terms as years and seasons, months and days and nights.<sup>18</sup>

But even with its structure and its activity fashioned in the image of the eternal, the sensible universe could not be regarded as finished. Further possibilities of existence contained in the intelligible pattern remained unembodied—the various species of animals appropriate to the four elements. These Forms the Creator now put into effect. First he made the lesser Gods, creating them out of fire, and placed them as fixed stars in the outer heaven or circle of the Same. To them he gave two motions, one of revolution upon their axes, expressive of their divine power ever "to think consistently the same thoughts about the same things," the other a movement of undeviating

<sup>16</sup> 37 C–38 B.

<sup>17</sup> On this point cf. Archer-Hind, *Timaeus of Plato*, p. 132, note 9; Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 448 ff.; Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 347 ff.

<sup>18</sup> 38 B–39 D.

revolution about the centre of the universe, undisturbed by the irregularities of planetary motion. The Gods of popular belief, Plato adds, perhaps not altogether without malice, may be best regarded as generated in the way people believe them to have been.<sup>19</sup>

Then the Creator entrusted to the lesser Gods the creation of the bodies of the animals which dwell in air and sea and on the earth. This he did to ensure and mark their inferiority to the race of Gods. Their soul, however, he mixed with his own hands, out of the remnants of the world-soul, but considerably diluted. And he distributed it among the stars, one soul to a star, pointing out that all souls must of necessity descend into human bodies for at least one incarnation, but that thereafter they would rise or fall according to the manner of their earthly lives, returning to their stars or passing into women, or later into animals, as the case might be. Meantime the lesser Gods, obedient to the Creator's behest, took portions of the four elements from the world, and welded them together to form the bodies and bodily faculties of the lower animals and man.<sup>20</sup>

There follows a long anatomical and physiological discussion of the human body and of the disturbances to which it is subject. Into this we have not the time to go in detail, but we may jot down a few of its most important points. As a dwelling place for the immortal part of the soul the Gods first created the head, whose roundness imitates the spherical shape of the universe, and renders it also a suitable receptacle for the circles of the Same and the Other, or of the rational and the sensible, in which thought moves. And in this head they placed sense organs. But, now, the soul, when incarnate, requires more than an instrument of thought and sensation. She needs a complete animal organism with all sorts of animal functions to keep it alive. Therefore the body with all its parts was appended to the head, and to the immortal soul a mortal soul was added for the purpose of animating everything below the neck. This mortal soul is the seat of the passions and of pleasure and pain and desire. The Gods, however, divided it into two—a spirited, contentious portion often actuated by desire but amenable to rea-

<sup>19</sup> 39 E-40 E.

<sup>20</sup> 41 A-43 A. Cf. 69 B.



son, which they placed in the thorax, and a portion sensitive to all the bodily desires, which they set in the abdomen, as far away from reason as possible, and shut off from the rest of the body by the diaphragm. The heart is the seat of the spirited part of the soul and is the channel through which reason controls the body. And the liver reflects on its polished surface the suggestions, gentle or threatening, of reason to our animal passions. The bowels are of the length they are in order that man may have time to think.<sup>21</sup>

This outline, in which the threefold soul of the *Republic* reappears now domiciled in a three-decker body, is filled out and supplemented by speculations regarding the composition of marrow, flesh, bone, hair, and nails, the functioning of the sense organs, the nature of reproduction, the mechanism of respiration and of the movement of air and fire within the organism, and the causes and kinds of disease.<sup>22</sup> And finally we are told that vegetable life was created and endowed with a vital principle akin to the lowest part of the soul, in order that the human body might be properly nourished.<sup>23</sup>

But the tale of creation is even now not complete. We have contemplated the system of Forms whose organization serves as an ideal living being or universe after which the sensible order is patterned. And we have watched the process by which the phenomenal world is made in the image of the perfect and the eternal, noting that all soul is compounded of the principles of the Same and the Other, that is, of reason and of sense, and all body of the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth. We have seen, too, how the blind and purposeless motions which originally agitated the material elements were made subservient to the perfect design, and were turned into orderly and purposive physical and astronomical movement and organic activity. Two levels of existence—those of Being and Becoming—have been explored and mapped.

There remains, however, a third level—a dark and misty region into whose physical aspects we have as yet only penetrated a few steps. In the *Republic* we saw already that the world of Becoming—the phenomenal universe—was compounded of two

<sup>21</sup> 44 D, 47 E, 69 B, 73 B.

<sup>22</sup> 61 C-92 B.

<sup>23</sup> 73 A.

principles, Being, or the system of Forms, and something that Plato was then content to call vaguely Not-Being and to let it go at that. It was this third something that accounted apparently for everything in the sensible object except its Form—for its particular existence, its sensible and corporeal nature, and its change and movement. And yet the paradox remained that if this third something had to be called not-being—as it had to be if the Forms were the only things possessed of real existence—then it must be non-existent and nothing. In other words, nothing accounted for the material and sensible aspects of the phenomenal world. They were unreal, were false appearances. In the *Sophist* we found Plato grappling with this paradox. “Not,” he had concluded, was a sign, not of absolute non-existence, but merely of a kind of existence different from that immediately predicated. Hence not-being did not mean nothing, but simple being that is *other than* that of the Ideas. In this way, by extending the realm of being so as to include motion, variety, individuality, and the like, he came to the rescue of the sensible world, which in the *Republic* showed alarming symptoms of expiring into Eleatic “false opinion” and illusion, and restored it to vigor and reality.

The case, however, was still perplexing. What were the ingredients of this medicine which had brought back life and flesh, color and animation, to the wan and fading cheeks of the sensible world? What was the nature of this principle that underlay *being other than* the Ideas? To call it simply “The Other” or “Difference” did not explain but merely restated the existence of such being. It smacked of “*Le Medicin malgré lui*” and of saying that the reason opium put you to sleep was because it had a soporific power. The discovery of God and the soul in the prescription might, to be sure, account for its invigorating properties. They were potent tonics capable of imparting movement and life, function and organization, to a sensible universe. But they had no food value. They could not provide stuff for the organization to assimilate and organize, or for life and movement to animate. They could not make the universe put on flesh. There was more, then, than God and soul to *being other than* the Ideas. There was an “otherness”

nutritive rather than tonic, a fleshly kind of being that explained the solid, extended, and in general the physical and corporeal, aspects of the world. This residual principle of difference from Form was indispensable. Without it God and the soul would have had nothing to mould and to breathe life and structure into. It was, then, as necessary a factor in the existence of a phenomenal order as they were. Once more, what was it? How was it to be described and defined?

In the *Philebus* we saw Plato dwelling upon "otherness" as that which permits differences and fluctuations of degree and relation, like more or less, higher and lower, swifter and slower, and renaming it the "indeterminate" or "unlimited." Here, we had not only a tentative formula expressing the nature of change, motion, and variety in the sensible world, but one that also described the unconfined and versatile power of reason to discover all sorts of relations between the Forms and to pass more or less directly, and with more or less celerity, from one to the other by various routes laid out in a kind of "intelligible space." And in discussing the Platonic theory of numbers we found this principle mathematically formulated as the indeterminate dyad, or twiceness, which is the permissive condition of all the arithmetical processes of deriving multiplicity from unity and unity from multiplicity. And in further defining it as the great-and-the-small he was working towards a definition that seemed to merge geometry and arithmetic in a concept prophetic of the modern theory of the *continuum*. But we have had to wait for the *Timaeus* to find "otherness" transferred from logic and mathematics to physics and made the basis of a theory of matter.

To follow this transition we must go back in the dialogue to the point where Plato tells us that God made the body of the world out of fire, air, water, and earth, which he found existing in rudimentary form and driven aimlessly about in a state of primitive chaos. At this point Plato checks himself sharply. These, he tells himself and us, cannot after all be ultimate matter. For even in their rudimentary state they show, however faintly, traces of the Forms of the four elements. Moreover, they are continually changing into one another, or, in other



words, changing their Forms. There must, then, be something in them *other than* Form, "a similar principle circulating in each and all of them" which is no more *this* Form than it is *that*, but is merely thus and thus. What, then, is this something *other than* Form which is equally complaisant to all Forms and no Form, and both takes on one shape after another and appears in a number of shapes at the same time? <sup>24</sup>

In answering this question we may perhaps reason as follows without being unfaithful to Plato's thought. The "materialization" of the Forms in a physical universe does not in any way add to or alter the system of Forms as such. With or without a sensible world the Forms are what they are. Hence the "otherness" of a physical order from the world of Ideas cannot lie in its possession of any new Form of being. It must come rather from a non-formal dimension of existence, projection into which somehow "extends" and gives "body" to unextended and incorporeal essences. For example, if we put a duplicate photograph into a stereoscope, we do not change in any way the forms and figures printed upon it. We make the two photographs look as if they were one, to be sure, but beyond that we do no more than give a new dimension, *depth*, to something that exists merely in the flat, and make a plane surface, every point of which is equally close to the eye, appear as a group of solids some nearer, some farther away. In like manner, when the Forms are "stereoscoped" by matter and given a physical dimension, each Form, in itself an indivisible unit, looks as if it were many individual instances of itself following upon or spread out beside one another. And the whole system of Forms, which in itself exists on a flatly logical "plane" of being, now appears as if its components were "placed" to the right or the left, in front or behind, and occupied more or less "room." In other words, they give an impression of being in *space*.

Place or space, then, is the non-logical dimension, projection in which makes the world of Ideas look as if it were also a physical universe. In this lies the secret, and the whole secret, of the sensible object's being "other than" its Form. Visible "red," for example, is just redness *somewhere*, in other words

<sup>24</sup> 49 A-50 A.

redness plus a *point* at which to *appear*. The tangible, individual man is merely the Form of man unfolded in or occupying a *place*. The particular courageous, or temperate, or just act is courage, or temperance, or justice occurring at some *spot*. The particular thing of beauty is beauty *here* and *now*. Again, the Ideas, when projected in space, are different from and yet the same as the Ideas in themselves, just as the photograph, when given stereoscopic projection, is different from and yet the same as the photograph in the flat. And just as we might call the stereoscopic projection, in spite of its identity with its original, an image or shadow cast by the original and in a sense a copy of it in a new dimension, so we might call the presentation of the Ideas as a physical universe an image, or shadow, or copy cast by the Ideas upon a "place." It is space, then, that makes the Ideas appear as images of themselves and that presents them as physical objects. And finally, if we take away from the sensible world redness, and human nature, and courage, temperance, justice, and beauty, and all the other qualities, types, laws, and values that it displays, there still will remain an empty receptacle of some sort that once did contain them. The "place" they occupied may be vacant, but it is still there. Since, then, the physical universe is nothing but the world of Forms plus this dimension of "place" which makes them look as if they took up "room" and had spatial relations, Plato concludes that this is the sum and substance of the material principle.<sup>25</sup>

This space we are told is the "receptacle, and in a manner the nurse, of all generation." It is uncreated, changeless, and eternal, the mother of all things, within whose womb the Ideas father the sensible world. "The natural recipient of all impressions," it "is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them." But in itself it is "formless and free from the impress of any of the shapes which it is hereafter to receive from without." For if it had a Form and positive nature, it would resist the impression of

<sup>25</sup> 48 E-51 B; 52 B-C. Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 344; Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 456; Robin, *La Place de la Physique dans la Philosophie de Platon*, p. 29; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

Forms unlike its own. We can only speak of it, then, as absolute emptiness, blankness, formlessness.<sup>26</sup>

Such a principle naturally baffles thought and description. It can be neither perceived nor conceived, since it is what is left after everything perceivable and conceivable in an object has been taken away. It must be devoid, not only of sensible qualities, but even, paradoxically enough, of all thinkable spatial characteristics. For even geometrical structure—the different points and places and figures, however abstract, that pure mathematics posits in so-called empty space—are really not space itself but a spatial content, a shaping of space, an application to it of concepts, a giving to it of Form. That they are there means that the Ideas have already appeared in space and made it conceivable.

How, then, can experience and thought ever reach this principle and rationalize it? They cannot, Plato replies. And yet, if we remove from space all the perceptible qualities and conceivable Forms without which it cannot be presented to the mind, the mind, as Plato goes on to point out, will still be haunted by a dreamlike sense of its presence.<sup>27</sup> The feeling will persist that there is more to the universe than the Forms we have abstracted, an “other” responsible for their appearance as images, and that this “difference” of the image from the Idea, which lies in the possession of place and dimensions, is still *there*. Think away the Ideas which God and the soul are “filming” upon the mysterious screen of pure space, and, although the screen with its dimensions vanishes, too, and can no longer be located, the eyes of the mind will remain strained towards and converged upon a “place” where the Ideas were displayed as images. They still retain a sense of depth and perspective and of an “out there” into which the Forms have been projected. For an image, since it is not Form in itself, but the projection or shadow of Form, “must be inferred to be in another (*i.e.*, in space) or it could not be at all.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, if the mind saw “flat” so to speak, when the sensible object was resolved into Forms, and lost this sense of “place” outside them,

<sup>26</sup> 49 A–52 A.

<sup>27</sup> 52 B.

<sup>28</sup> 52 C. Cf. Archer-Hind, *op. cit.*, p. 185, note 10.



then the universe would cease to be sensible in proportion as it became intelligible, and understanding the physical world, which is a process of reducing it to types and laws, would be a process of actually destroying its physical status. But this as a matter of fact is not the case. The universe is none the less material and spatial when it becomes transparent to thought and is seen as a system of Forms. The truth about things is, to be sure, no longer distorted by ignorance and false opinion so as to appear other than it is; but it is, for all that, still a truth about *things*, and it appears to the mind in a dimension other than that in which its truthfulness exists. Matter and space, then, may be a void when separated from the Forms which fill them and give them being, but they are a void that aches.

Pure reasoning, however, cannot stomach this pure "matter" which it is forced to swallow. It cannot see how a Form can both be and not be a Form, exist both in and outside itself, and "be one and also two at the same time."<sup>29</sup> So thought suffers from a chronic acute indigestion in dealing with the problem of matter, and is in a perpetual state of daze and distress. The confusion and paradox of a mind haunted by this blank "whereness" to which it can attribute no form of being whatsoever, and yet whose existence it is bound by the necessities of logic to infer as an indispensable condition of a physical universe, Plato sums up by saying that we have of pure matter an "illegitimate" or "bastard" concept,<sup>30</sup>—an abortive formulation, as it were, of the formless. Or we might express our predicament even more vividly in the metaphor used by a Greek disciple of Plato's in pondering upon the same difficulty some five hundred years later. Conceiving pure matter, Plotinus tells us, is like seeing darkness.<sup>31</sup> For darkness, being the utter absence of all visibility, logically cannot make an impression on the eye, and yet somehow manages to do so.<sup>32</sup>

We pass next to the problem of deriving tri-dimensional

<sup>29</sup> 52 C.

<sup>30</sup> 52 B.

<sup>31</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 8, § 4.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the Platonic theory of matter as "place" or space, cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 343 ff.; Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 456 ff.; Robin, *La Place de la Physique*, pp. 27 ff.; Archer-Hinds, *op. cit.*, pp. 44 ff.

space and bodies from formless, unconceived, and unperceived "place." The most elemental discernible matter—that is, the simplest *Forms* of matter—are fire, air, water, and earth, and these are corporeal particles. But how, by the application of Form, can solidity and bulk be imparted to a blank "where," and physical objects be fashioned out of absolute emptiness? This is obviously a puzzling question, almost as baffling, indeed, to the mind as the necessity of logically inferring that which cannot be logically conceived. Plato, however, is ready with a solution. Solids, he argues, are composed of planes, and the simplest plane figure is the triangle, which needs the minimum of lines to enclose and delineate it. All solids, then, may be regarded as produced by the juxtaposition of triangles. The simplest triangles, again, into which all others may be resolved, are the right-angled isosceles and the right-angled scalene. These we may assume to be the first formulation or "lay out" of pure space.<sup>33</sup> And, already before God appeared upon the scene, they were apparently in the habit of piecing themselves together into solids in such wise that they exhibited faint traces of the formations that make up the elements. Furthermore, as we have seen, these vague and rudimentary bodies were already in motion, but a motion directed, not by intelligence in accordance with a plan, but by the "necessities" of their own natures.<sup>34</sup>

God, however, proceeded to rebuild these bodies, and, acting in accordance with the laws of number, harmony, and proportion, he recombined their triangles in the four most beautiful combinations possible to them. In this general way he built up by special methods, too devious for us to follow here, four types of geometrical solids distinguished only by size and shape. Any single instance of such solids is too small to be seen, but, when they are collected together after their kind, their aggregates are visible as sensible fire, air, water, and earth.<sup>35</sup> The structures of the first three can, because of certain geometrical affinities, be integrated or disintegrated into one another's Forms. Fire, air, and water do actually turn into one another. Here, Plato apparently has in mind the phenomena of water evaporating through mist into air, and of air

<sup>33</sup> 53 C-54 C.<sup>34</sup> 52 D-53 B.<sup>35</sup> 53 C-56 C.

shimmering away in heat waves into fire. But earth, whose particles are composed of immobile cubes incapable of division into the kind of triangles found in the other elements, cannot "become" the others, but preserves always its own nature.<sup>36</sup> The various species of fire and air and the different kinds of liquid and solid existence are to be explained by the different sizes of the typical triangles and geometrical figures formed of them.<sup>37</sup> In short, all qualitative change can be explained in terms of movement in space.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, God harmonized and ordered the motions of these particles.<sup>39</sup> By the "necessity" of their natures the molecules of the different elements tend to be shaken away from one another and to flock together according to their feather with a momentum proportionate to their bulk. Our notions of up and down, rising and falling, light and heavy, are drawn from and are relative to these movements. There is no absolute up and down in space.<sup>40</sup> The innate attraction of particles of the same element for one another is counteracted by the circular movement of the heavens, which compresses the elements into one another and fills the chinks between the larger particles of the grosser substances with particles of the finer. This ordering of the "necessary" movements of the elements by the perfect movement of the heavens keeps all things in a state of perpetual change and motion according to a definite pattern and law.<sup>41</sup>

The reduction of matter to sheer space and of all qualitative change to change of position pure and simple has been hailed by modern critics as a feat comparable to Descartes' universal application of mathematical concepts to the physical sciences.<sup>42</sup> Not only were all Forms expressible in arithmetical formulae, but the whole process of becoming which underlies the sensible

<sup>36</sup> 54 C-D; 56 D-57 B.

<sup>37</sup> 57 D; 58 C-61 B.

<sup>38</sup> 57 C.

<sup>39</sup> 53 B.

<sup>40</sup> 57 D-58 A; 63 A-E.

<sup>41</sup> 58 A-C; 62 C-63 E.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 454 ff.; Robin, *op. cit.*, pp. 60 ff.; Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-358.



world could now be interpreted in terms of mere shifting of place. And again, that which shifted could be resolved into a variety of arrangements of one and the same fundamental geometrical figure. Thus, with the final "geometrizing" of its physical connotations, that "name of many names"—not-being, the other, the indeterminate, the dyad, the-great-and-the-small—was finally brought, like being, under the reign of mathematical law. Indeed nothing remained beyond the reach of mathematics except the final irreducible surd, the inexplicable fact that there is a sensible as well as an intelligible dimension to the universe, which forces a double life upon the Ideas through no fault of their own. But this brute fact is a cosmic scandal which comes sooner or later to the ears of every philosophy, and which none has ever been able quite to hush up. Sensible data are given, are simply *there*, and their presence can never be rationalized.<sup>43</sup> Plato, we may feel, has come as near as any other philosopher to finding a value for  $x$ , and we need not begrudge him the feeling, expressed at the close of the *Timaeus*, that from his hands the physical universe has emerged a "sensible God who is the image of the intellectual, the greatest, best, fairest, most perfect—the one only-begotten heaven."<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, the dialogue presents many inconsistencies and difficulties. It raises, of course, very acutely the question of the place of God in the Platonic system. Again, in describing the relation of the sensible world to the Forms, it reverts to the language and apparently to the theory of "participation" in its crudest form of "imitating" or "copying"—a way of expressing the relation of the Form to the sensible object that Plato appears to have repudiated, as we have seen, in the *Parmenides*. And the division of the human soul into a mortal and an immortal part, and the doctrine that even the immortal part is created, not to speak of the created character of the world-soul itself, are at variance with the teaching of the *Phaedrus* that each individual soul is uncreated, eternal, and essentially one and indivisible. Finally, the statement that God finds primeval chaos already in a spontaneous disordered

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

<sup>44</sup> 92 C.

and random motion of its own contradicts the view explicitly set forth in the *Phaedrus* that the soul is the self-moving cause of *all* movement whatsoever.

This last statement, moreover, is retracted, if not directly, at least by implication, in the *Laws*, where Plato returns to the teaching of the *Phaedrus*. In Book X, after analyzing various kinds of movements and reducing them all to two types, self-moving and that which moves an other than itself, he finds their least common denominator in soul, whose spontaneous psychic activities, he tells us, are the causes of all physical motion throughout the universe.<sup>45</sup> In that case, soul must be responsible for the evil in the world, and this conclusion he accepts without demur.<sup>46</sup> There are, he goes on, not one soul, but at least two souls, one of which is "the author of good, the other of evil."<sup>47</sup> The good soul directs all the orderly movements of the mind and of the physical universe. The evil soul, or souls, are responsible for disorder in Nature and for folly and senselessness in the human being.<sup>48</sup>

But however acceptable a *scientific* explanation this might be of the failure of the universe to move wholly in accordance with the divine plan, it involved Plato in immediate difficulties elsewhere. For where did the evil soul or souls come from? What place had they in a world created and governed by an all-wise and all-good God? Plato had got out of the frying pan only to get into the fire. In solving the problem of motion he had raised the problem of evil. To this we now return for a moment.

In the *Statesman* Plato had laid imperfection to the disorderly nature of matter which makes the universe forget little by little the precepts of its Creator.<sup>49</sup> And from this point of view the evil propensities in soul might be regarded as a kind of secondary and degraded state ascribable to the material admixture in her composition of the principle of the "Other." Thus the origin of imperfection might still, in spite of the intervention of soul, be referred to the corrupting influence of not-

<sup>45</sup> 896 A-D; 897 A.

<sup>46</sup> 896 D.

<sup>47</sup> 896 E.

<sup>48</sup> 897 A; 898 A-B.

<sup>49</sup> *Statesman*, 373 A-B.

being,<sup>50</sup> and particularly to its physical phase. That Plato considered matter the source of evil is expressly stated by Aristotle.<sup>51</sup> But whether this is his last word on the subject has been questioned. The ancients interpreted the passages in the *Laws* to mean that there are two world-souls, one as innately evil as the other is innately good, and that the imperfection of man and of the world proceeds from the activities of a power to all intents and purposes diabolic in itself. And some modern commentators have accepted this interpretation as true at least to the view held by Plato in his old age.<sup>52</sup> Others, while rejecting it, do so only on the ground that we have no warrant for restricting the number of evil souls to one, and are emphatic in declining to regard the ascription of evil to matter as the final Platonic doctrine.<sup>53</sup>

There is much to be said for this position. Certainly the reduction of the indeterminate to a mathematical concept and the identification of its physical aspect with pure space had unfitted it for the rôle of villain in the cosmic drama, and made the lines assigned to it in the *Statesman* sound quite out of place. In the *Timaeus* Plato was already insisting upon the essential formlessness of matter and its lack of a positive character of any sort, and this precisely that it might not "intrude its own shape" upon the Forms with which it was impressed and thus "take the impression badly."<sup>54</sup> It proved to be perfectly non-resistant and transparent, without speck or flaw to blur or distort the Forms that appeared in and through it. Moreover, the doctrine of an inherent disorderly motion in matter stood, when it was carried over from the *Statesman* to the *Timaeus*, in obvious contradiction, not only to the teaching that soul is the source of all motion, but also to the doctrine of matter as pure "place." In itself "place" was not in motion of any kind. And it lent itself equally to the reception of movements of all sorts. But all these movements had to be introduced into it

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Robin, *La Pensée Grecque*, pp. 274-275, who accepts intractable matter as Plato's ultimate explanation of evil.

<sup>51</sup> *Metaphysics*, I, 6. 988a 10-16; *Physics*, I, 9. 192a 14-15.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-334; Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 491-492.

<sup>54</sup> *Timaeus*, 50 D-E.



from the outside and to originate in external causes to which alone they owed their being and their direction.

That matter, then, had a spontaneous "necessary" or "reverse" motion of its own, opposed to purposive activity and resistant to the divine plan, was a difficult theory to hold. No "necessity" could be found in its nature for things going badly when God let go the helm and left them to themselves.<sup>55</sup> Necessity, the other, the indeterminate, not-being, turned out on examination to be morally innocuous principles. They meant that the fact of a sensible world resists reason merely in the sense that it is a fact the Ideas cannot account for and logic cannot explain. But there was nothing in them to show why the Forms, when projected in a sensible dimension, should behave unreasonably and look *worse* than they really were. All in all, when one came to investigate the nature of matter one had to grant it a complete alibi, so far as responsibility for evil-doing in the universe was concerned.

Thus Plato might seem by his own logic to have cleared matter of any suspicions that he entertained about it in his earlier thinking, and to have forced himself to search for his villain elsewhere. And, as in the dénouement of most detective stories, everything suddenly pointed, now that the false scent had been abandoned, to one of the most respectable and godly characters in the plot. The real criminal, at whose door all the wrong going and doing of the universe must be laid, could be none less than soul herself. Evil was essentially disorderly activity, physical and mental. And soul was self-confessedly the cause of all motion whatsoever. Therefore soul must be ultimately responsible for disorderly as well as orderly movement both in herself and in the world. She was not corrupted and egged on by matter. On the contrary it was she that corrupted and upset matter by her evil communications. To deny this, would have involved denying one of the cardinal points in the Platonic system.

Still, to accept it without qualification would have been equally destructive. For in that case, the best that could be said of soul was that she was an absolutely unmoral principle indifferent in her works to the distinction between good and

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Statesman*, 269 C-D, 272 E-273 A.

evil and to the success of the divine plan. And if she were created by God, God after all was alone responsible for what she was, now that the principle of the "Other" in her composition had lost any possible immoral significance. But if God were responsible, then he, too, became unmoral, the author of evil as well as good. And that spelled good-bye to the last vestiges of teleology, design, divine purpose, and a moral government of the world. One might just as well, and even rather better, have had the hated mechanism of Democritus as the agent that enacted and embodied the Forms.

Plato, it will be observed, was thus confronted at last fairly and squarely with the dilemma that had troubled him in the *Parmenides*. The conclusions to which he was driven as a scientist were once more at loggerheads with the views that as a religious and moral zealot and reformer he wished to hold. In the earlier dialogue he had been troubled by the thought, to which science and dialectic inevitably led, that there must be Forms of evil things as well as good, and that therefore the explanation of evil must be sought in the world of Ideas. Now we may imagine his science, with a logic that could no longer be evaded, exposing the nefarious doings of a principle scarcely less divine and exalted, and turning the world-soul into a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Finding himself between the two fires of science and religion, and deprived by his own reasoning of any retreat in the direction of intractable matter, he could escape from his predicament by one path only. There was nothing for it but to cut Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in two. They must be regarded not as two aspects of one and the same soul, but as fundamentally different kinds of soul, innately antagonistic to each other. There must be one set of souls, headed, let us say, by God, whose natures inclined them to sow law and order and goodness in the "receptacle of all generation," another set whose natures impelled them to heedlessness of the ideal scheme and to disorderly and obstructive conduct.<sup>56</sup> Though Plato apparently still clung in the *Laws* to the view expressed in the *Timaeus* that human souls are created, albeit indestructible, the divine souls are

<sup>56</sup> *Laws*, X, 906 A-B.

declared to be without beginning as well as without end,<sup>57</sup> and the implication is that the sources of evil in the world are co-eternal with the sources of good. At any rate, only on such a supposition could he have cleared God from responsibility for evil. If we may assume this—and certainly it is the impression one gathers from the *Laws*—the reconciliation of Plato's science and his theology might have been complete in his own eyes at least. Soul would still have been the cause of all motion and activity and life, as his science insisted, but God, as the moralist and religious devotee desired and demanded, could still be worshipped and glorified as the author of only what is good.

Such a solution, moreover, would have been in line with the tendency of his old age to think in theological terms and with his evident inclination to dramatize and magnify to cosmic proportions the conflict between virtue and vice.<sup>58</sup> Possibly, too, a growing acquaintance with Persian dualism and with the Zoroastrian vision of the universe as an everlasting struggle between the powers of light and darkness may have contributed to his thought.<sup>59</sup> But in any case, such favorite weapons of the theologian as teleology, the argument from design, and the evidence for a moral government of the world are notably double-edged and keen in malicious insinuations. For, taken at its *moral* face-value the world is double-faced, and seems as often to frown as to smile upon our well-being. Hence, to find a purpose in it is, if we are unprejudiced and all-inclusive in our findings, to discover cross-purpose. We can scarcely argue that the favorable and helpful aspects of the universe are evidence of divine design and guidance, unless we are willing to admit that the obstructive and harmful aspects look like the handiwork of a malevolent intelligence. And if the evidence for design is trustworthy in the one case, it must be trustworthy in the other. The shoe, to be sure, may pinch sentiment and reason when it is on the other foot, and may provoke outcries against superstition from many a good theist who thinks it as unreasonable to believe in a devil as it is reasonable to believe in God. But the logic would seem to be inexorable. If there

<sup>57</sup> X, 904 A.

<sup>58</sup> X, 904 A-906 E.

<sup>59</sup> Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, p. 134.



is no ground for inferring an evil purpose behind the evil in the world, there is no ground for inferring a good purpose behind the good. And conversely, if there is reason for supposing that what is good from our point of view is deliberately *planned* for the best, there is equal reason for supposing that what is bad from our point of view is deliberately *planned* for the worst.

The argument from design, then, taken in itself turns out to be as forceful an argument for diabolism as for theism, and cannot be used exclusively in support of either. Teleology, if left to itself and honestly conducted, plays no favorites. It matches each throw in favor of a personal deity with one in favor of a personal devil. To load the dice for God and against the devil we must go outside the argument from design altogether and find other considerations—but considerations, it will be discovered, that forbid us to look upon everything in the universe as the work of mind and purpose, and therefore as intelligently designed. Moreover, we might even then reverse the argument, and maintain that the good in the world springs from the mechanical resistance offered by matter to the purpose of an evil designer. So far, however, as we seek like Plato—and like so many modern theologians—to apply teleology universally and to regard the entire structure of the universe as evidence of intelligent contrivance, we cannot logically escape the conclusion that evil as well as good contrivers have had a finger in the pie. In marching straight to this conclusion Plato was much more honest and logical than the mass of teleologists and theists to-day, who spend endless hours trying to “justify” God by showing that the worst is like the best and that what seems evil is really good. His theory of an evil world-soul or souls is not a strange vagary but part and parcel of his theism. Indeed, as one critic has remarked,<sup>60</sup> it is so consistent with his teleology and with his theory of mind as the cause of all cosmic activity that we should accept it without demur, were it not for his earlier flirtations with free-will and intractable matter. Doubtless, too, the reluctance of some commentators to regard the doctrine as really Platonic and their efforts to explain it away reflect in no small degree the unwillingness of modern

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 546, note 118.

philosophers in general to take the devil seriously, and their consequent dismay at finding him on lips whose other words of teleological import they hail as sweetly reasonable.

What we have been saying presupposes, of course, that Plato really did believe all along, or did really come in the end to believe, literally, steadily, and whole-heartedly in a personal Creator. For, obviously, we do not have to descend to personalities in dealing with the evil in the universe unless we have already become involved in them when dealing with the good.

The evidence of the *Philebus*, the *Sophist*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Statesman* is, if taken at its face value, certainly in favor of attributing to him such a belief. To this we must now add the testimony of the *Laws*. In this last dialogue of his old age Plato argues with great vehemence in support of theism. The existence of the Gods is proved, in his opinion, both by the regularity and order of the movements of the heavenly bodies and by the universality of the belief in divine beings.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, everything points to the fact that the Gods are moral beings, absolutely good, acquainted with the needs of the universe and of mankind, and actively interested to the smallest detail in defeating disorder and evil and ensuring the triumph of justice and right, both in the world at large and in human affairs.<sup>62</sup> Nor are their justice and their righteousness of a kind to be turned from their paths by the prayers and propitiatory sacrifices, the incantations and the flatteries, of frightened sinners seeking to avert divine retribution.

This assertion of the existence of moral and personal deities exercising a providential control of man and the world is reinforced by a vigorous attack upon the materialists and the mechanicalists, who maintain that the physical elements "all exist by nature and by chance, and none of them by art," and that in a purely mechanical way, with no design or purpose whatsoever, the heavenly bodies, the earth, and all that dwell therein have been built up out of them. In fact, Plato avers, these philosophers maintain that human institutions, and even morality itself, are purely accidental and relative things, and that the very Gods are only fictions of the human imagination.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *Laws*, X, 886-888 A.

<sup>62</sup> 899 D-905 C.

<sup>63</sup> 889 A-890 B.

To these opinions Plato replies with his doctrine, with which we are already familiar, that all motion and life must derive from a living and intelligent principle which is self-caused and self-moving. This principle is soul. The orderliness of the world presupposes a rational and good soul as the governor of all things; though, as we have already seen, the existence of disorder and evil necessitates the admission that a portion of this soul-principle is inferior and wayward by nature.<sup>64</sup> The "best soul,"<sup>65</sup> which is responsible for the order and rationality of nature, would seem to be God. Elsewhere Plato speaks of "the ruler of the universe" who "has ordered all things with a view to the excellence and preservation of the whole";<sup>66</sup> the "king" who "has contrived so to place each of the parts that their position might in the easiest and best manner procure the victory of good and the defeat of evil."<sup>67</sup> Besides the supreme director of all things, there are souls of the heavenly bodies, and they, too, are divine; so that "all things are full of Gods."<sup>68</sup>

Securely protected, however, as Plato's claim to be considered a good, old-fashioned theist might seem, it has afforded no shelter against the searching winds of criticism, and we find ourselves once more assailed with the old doubts and cut adrift upon a sea of troubles, with no hope of haven or sure anchorage. For the question at once arises whether the evidence can be taken at its face-value. How much is "myth," how much figurative, how much has to be discounted? Did Plato really regard God, always or in the end, as a being separate from the Ideas and the Good? Is this description of him as a "best soul" and a kind of "king" of souls to be taken as accurate, as some critics maintain?<sup>69</sup> Or was the divine intellect the place where the Forms existed, and were the Ideas its thoughts?<sup>70</sup> In that case, is God to be identified with the Idea of the Good, and is the Idea of the Good to be conceived as a quasi-personal Su-

<sup>64</sup> 891 C-898 B.

<sup>65</sup> 898 C.

<sup>66</sup> 903 B.

<sup>67</sup> 904 A-C.

<sup>68</sup> 898 E-899 B.

<sup>69</sup> Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 355 ff.; Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 492 ff.

<sup>70</sup> Lutoslawski, *Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic*, p. 477.



preme Mind? <sup>71</sup> Or did the divine pilot of the *Statesman*, the designing Creator of the *Timaeus*, and the God of the *Laws* belong to Plato's poetry and mythology rather than to his metaphysics? Were they personifications, not to be taken literally, of the dynamic aspect of the whole system of Forms, or Idea of the Good, picturesque expressions of the fact that it is the world of Ideas that gives being and structure to the sensible universe? <sup>72</sup> And if so, did this personification start from the Idea of the Good and superadd a personal deity, <sup>73</sup> or does it represent the more naïve tendency of thought still clinging to the more abstract and philosophical concept developed out of it? <sup>74</sup> Or finally, did Plato to the end waver between two moods, one scientific, the other religious, conceiving the source of all being, determination, and order in things now as a personal God, now as the system of Forms, taken in its wholeness, constituting an impersonal Idea of the Good? <sup>75</sup> Such are some of the questions raised by modern scholars. Any one of them we may answer as we choose, and have good authority for our choice. And whatever answer we do give will be immediately rejected by an imposing array of critics. We shall do well then to regard this chorus of divergent opinion as the grand *finale* of our speculation, and in the midst of it to ring down the curtain on the unsolved problem of what Plato really meant by God.

But in so doing, we are gathering up our wraps and leaving the Platonic theatre still in doubt as to the real explanation of evil. Was the evil world-soul (or souls) also a purely mythological and picturesque characterization? Was evil purely negative and merely a defect in the sensible presentation of the Ideas? <sup>76</sup> If so, did matter, despite its neutralization in the *Timaeus*, still retain for Plato, however inconsistently, an intractability and an obstructive element of necessity never wholly amenable to purpose? <sup>77</sup> Or was he haunted to the end

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 279 ff.; Archer-Hind, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff., 37 ff.

<sup>72</sup> Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 339 ff.; Raeder, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

<sup>73</sup> Raeder, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> Natorp, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>75</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>76</sup> Archer-Hind, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 337-340.

by the thought, hinted at in the *Parmenides*, that there must be Forms of evil? Or did he never get over the feeling expressed in the *Phaedrus* that the soul was for all eternity and inexplicably of a dual nature, inclined of herself to fall? Or did he always feel, as he seems to do in the *Republic* and again at one point in the *Timaeus*, that the responsibility for her fall could be laid to the free choice of the soul, even though she were created by a God who was the author of the good only? <sup>78</sup> Was there a development in his theory in which solutions previously held were later discarded? Or did he wobble between these various solutions, unable to make a choice between them, and holding to none of them more than tentatively? Here again we had better turn out the lights and leave to its obscurity an unsolved problem.

The reversion in the *Timaeus* to the metaphor of participation so severely criticized in the *Parmenides* has also given rise to perplexity and discussion, particularly on the part of the advocates of the "one-storey" interpretation of the theory of Ideas. Their tendency is to dismiss as mythological and figurative the accent placed upon the existence of two distinct enacted orders, and to maintain that it does not invalidate the essential unity of the ideal and the sensible worlds and the unenacted character of the Form when taken apart from the particular object. But, on the other hand, there are critics who maintain that the *Timaeus* reaffirms the "two-storey" theory of a separate, self-enacted world of Forms and frees it from the objections urged against it in the *Parmenides*. The difficulties inherent in the doctrine of "participation" are relieved, we are told, by the concept of matter as the receptacle of becoming. Without matter, participation would have reduced the sensible world to a kind of dangling appendage to the Ideas, wholly dependent on them for its existence. But matter gave the sensible world feet of its own to stand and move on. It was sufficient reason for something existing besides the Forms, and it explained the particular and individual character of objects. Thus the object could now "participate in" or "be like" its Idea without having all its being reduced to Form

<sup>78</sup> *Timaeus*, 42 B-D; cf. *Republic*, X, 617 D-E.

pure and simple. And conversely the Ideas could be present in their objects, and yet remain apart from them, now that there really existed a principle or medium different from themselves for them to appear in.<sup>79</sup> In other words, the realization that there is a mirror of some sort, and not mere nothingness, behind the sensible world enables us to regard that world as an image rather than an illusion, and a trustworthy image at that. Thus we are saved not only from barking at the reflection as if it were the being reflected, but also from feeling that we are most unaccountably seeing double and taking what is really one being as if it were two.

From this view, however, there might be considerable dissent. It might be disputed on the ground that under the aspect of the indeterminate Plato extended the material principle into the world of Forms itself, attributing to them, no less than to the sensible objects, "otherness," plurality, and individuality. In that case, obviously the matter in the particular objects would not brand them as things necessarily enacted in a different medium from the Forms and on a lower level. Nor would it be evidence that the Forms must have enacted existence outside the sensible universe.<sup>80</sup> Once more, perhaps, we had better let the *Timaeus* write *finis*, though not conclusion, so far as we are concerned, to a difference of opinion no end of which is in sight.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Robin, *La Place de la Physique*, etc., pp. 25 ff.

<sup>80</sup> Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 392 ff.



## CHAPTER XIII

### PLATO'S LATER POLITICAL THEORY

#### I

THERE remain a few words to be said about Plato's later political theory. Generally speaking, as we have already had occasion to note, his tendency was to make concessions to the actual conditions of human nature and its environment and to concern himself with working out schemes that he thought to be really practicable. But in his heart he felt that the institutions he was now proposing were only second-best, and his faith never wavered that the system he had advocated in the *Republic* was still ideal, even though he had come to recognize that among fallible human beings it was unworkable. The general form assumed by this relinquishment of hope was the substitution of a perfect system of impersonal laws for the perfect personal element in government exemplified by the "guardians" in the *Republic* and, as we shall see in a moment, by the ideal king in the *Statesman*. Moreover, because of his increasing insight into what could, or rather could not, be expected of mankind, and doubtless also because of the disillusionments he had suffered at the hands of Dionysius II and again in the troublous times after Dionysius had been driven out by Dion, the picture that these laws were intended to frame differed somewhat from that set forth in the *Republic*.

The change, however, was not abrupt. In the *Statesman*, a dialogue composed, it has been suggested, under the direct influence of his association with Dionysius II,<sup>1</sup> he still clung to the idea of government by a superior person, although he had not only abandoned the "guardians" for a single king, but had even dismissed the notion of perfect philosophic kingship,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 271, pp. 292 ff.; Raeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 350-351; Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

whether in the hands of one or many, to the realm of unattainable ideals. Statesmanship, to be sure, to the description of which Plato brings his method of definition, is not only knowledge, but knowledge exercised, and not only exercised, but exercised with supreme authority. The material upon which it is so expended is the human race, and the object of its knowledge is what is best for man. With such a vision and such stuff to work with, it is the queen of the applied sciences. And the statesman himself, being a worker not only in living stuff but in gregarious living stuff, and in a flock of human beings at that, is responsible for the maintenance and the management of the greatest and most important institution in the world, human society. Being conversant with the good and wholeheartedly solicitous for human welfare, as the shepherd is for the well-being of his sheep, his commands ought to be obeyed voluntarily and eagerly. His flock should find his service perfect freedom.

But alas! this picture is too good to be true. It was true, however, in bygone days in the Golden Age, when God himself was the shepherd-king and governed in person. But since the time when he "let go the helm," and things went to the bad, the picture no longer fits the facts. God, indeed, resumed the maintenance and direction of the universe, but not the management of human affairs. That he left to human beings, and since then kingship has been in fallible hands. Furthermore, kings are now faced with a problem which did not exist then. God's commands were voluntarily and joyfully obeyed by men, but the human king, reigning over fallen beings, deals with imperfect and recalcitrant subjects. He must weave strands of various and coarser texture together to form the fabric of the state.<sup>2</sup> Distinguishing the man best fitted for such a job is like picking the best weaver by nature out of a crowd of applicants. And this Plato goes on to do by employing again his method of definition by division.<sup>3</sup> The final selection, in which the true king is sorted out from the mass of those who pretend to political knowledge, is difficult to make, and the kind of magistrates that are elected by the people bear witness to the difficulty.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 279-283 B.

<sup>3</sup> 287 B-290.

<sup>4</sup> 291 A.

How, then, are we to spot the kingly man among the animals of every kind, the lions and the centaurs, the satyrs and other such "weak and shifty creatures;—protean shapes quickly changing into one another's forms and natures," that lay claim to political ability and take upon themselves the management of the state, as things now exist? The separation of the true from the spurious ruler Plato undertakes by reviewing the various forms of government actually in being. There prove to be six in number. According as it is exercised with or without the consent of the governed, the rule of the one gives us royalty and tyranny, that of the few, aristocracy and oligarchy.<sup>5</sup> And even democracy, in which the many rule the few and the poor the rich without respect for the wishes of the minority,<sup>6</sup> may on second thought be divided into two sorts, constitutional and lawless, according as its rule is or is not directed and restrained by written law. Philosophic kingship, of course, would be a seventh form if it were practicable, which it is not.<sup>7</sup>

Now, one and the same criticism may be brought against all these six forms. Each of them without exception rests upon false principles. In themselves the one, the few, the many, poverty, wealth, voluntary or compulsory submission, written law or its absence, are politically unsound unless they are accompanied by science and knowledge. But if science and knowledge are present, it makes little difference in theory which of the six forms government takes. Science, then, or knowledge of the art of government, is the distinguishing characteristic of the man fitted for kingship and serves to mark him out from the counterfeit claimants to political authority.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, so basic, so indispensable, and so satisfactory is science as a principle of government that the truly kingly man, of whom it is the mark, would do well to govern without laws, and might justly impose his will upon his subjects without, or even against, their consent.<sup>9</sup> Laws at the best can fit only general cases, and their very impartiality proves to be an ob-

<sup>5</sup> 291 C-292 A.

<sup>6</sup> 292 A.

<sup>7</sup> 303 A-B.

<sup>8</sup> 292 A-E.

<sup>9</sup> 293-294 A.



stinate and ignorant tyranny which "will not allow anything to be done contrary to its appointment or any question asked—not even in sudden changes of circumstances, when something happens to be better than what they commanded for some one. But the differences of men and actions, and the sudden irregular movements of human things, do not admit of any such universal and simple rule. And no art whatsoever can lay down a rule which will last for all time."<sup>10</sup>

Since, however, no human ruler "can sit at every man's side all through his life, prescribing for him the exact particulars of his duty," or give him absent treatment, written laws and unwritten customs laid down "for the majority, roughly meeting the cases of individuals," must be imposed. But these are concessions to an imperfect situation. No one possessed of royal science would consent to such restrictions upon his activity if he could help it. And even as things are, the legislator should always be ready to discard and alter laws as conditions change, just as the physician finds new remedies and alters his prescriptions.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the true king should pay no attention to the opinions of his subjects, but should use a "gentle violence for their good," and compel them, contrary to law and custom if need be, "to do what is juster and nobler and better than what they did before." The good physician compels his patients to do against their will things that are good for them, and is praised, not blamed, for so treating them. So too, the pilot is autocratic in his guidance of a ship. Autocracy, then, might well be the rule on the ship of state.<sup>12</sup>

Now, the kingly science, or statesmanship, is rare and the possession of a very few men at most. Hence the best form of government, which alone is justified in being autocratic, would be monarchy or, at any rate, an extremely limited aristocracy.<sup>13</sup> At the same time the difficulties of finding a truly wise king are so great and autocracy is so perilous that, as

<sup>10</sup> 294 B-C. The order has been changed and the translation slightly altered.

<sup>11</sup> 294 D-296 A.

<sup>12</sup> 296 A-297 B.

<sup>13</sup> 297 B-C.

things stand, the hands of the ruler must be tied to some extent.

The ordinary political methods of accomplishing this are, however, all wrong. Suppose one tried to check an incompetent or unscrupulous physician or pilot by calling together an assembly of ignorant laymen or landsmen and having them draw up a set of rules that all pilots or doctors must absolutely follow in the practice of their profession! Or suppose that we tried to correct matters by having pilots and physicians "appointed annually, either out of the rich, or out of the whole people . . . and elected by lot; and that after their selection they navigate vessels and heal the sick according to written rules" . . . and, again, after their year is up, have to give an account of their doings and defend themselves from all sorts of irresponsible accusations before a court of judges who know nothing of the subject! Or, finally, suppose our rules and regulations forbade any one "enquiring into piloting and navigation or into health and the true nature of medicine," and threatened with indictment as a distorter of truth and a corrupter of the young any one who questioned the written laws, advocated any action other than they allowed, or proposed anything new in their place! Where should we be? Such behavior would make all scientific inquiry unlawful and would be absolutely fatal to the progress and, for that matter, to the very existence, not only of medicine and navigation, but of every art. And yet this is just how all our present systems of government are behaving in the case of politics and, Plato might have added, had he lived to-day, of economics. Still, it must be admitted, it is better that even inflexible, short-sighted, and indiscriminating laws should be obeyed by all than that they should be broken "from motives of interest and favor, and without knowledge" by the kind of rulers we *elect* to office, and elect by devices like "a show of hands or . . . lot."<sup>14</sup>

We must, therefore, concede that law is a necessary limitation upon every type of authority short of the rule of the philosopher-king—that God among men of states,<sup>15</sup> as Plato, possibly influenced by Pythagorean teaching, calls it.<sup>16</sup> For

<sup>14</sup> 298–300 B.

<sup>15</sup> 303 B.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 48, p. 280, note.

that matter, it is doubtful whether mankind would accept unrestricted authority in even an ideal ruler, so suspicious are they of absolute power in the hands of a single man, however wise and good he may be.<sup>17</sup> At all events, in the actual world it is the presence of a constitution that differentiates the better from the worse in each of the six practicable forms—royalty from tyranny, aristocracy from oligarchy where it is a question of government by the few,<sup>18</sup> and even in the case of democracy, a constitutional sort, as the lesser of two evils, from a kind unrestrained by written law.<sup>19</sup>

But the safeguards of law by no means remove the necessity for statesmanship in the ruler. Therefore, in view of the fact that political wisdom is possessed at the most by a select few and, we may add, is applied with the least friction and the least division of counsels by one man alone, a monarchy safeguarded against possible misuse by the submission of the ruler as well as the ruled to constitutional restrictions is still the best practicable form of government. Moreover, the restraining laws in this case will not originate in popular assemblies composed of laymen who are ignorant of the subject, but will be based upon long experience and the wisdom of counsellors who have graciously recommended them and persuaded the multitude to pass them.<sup>20</sup>

Next to constitutional monarchy in order of merit we must rank the legally regulated rule of the few, or aristocracy, and then democracy stabilized by written law. Moreover, democracy "which is the worst of all lawful governments" is "the best of lawless ones." The multiplication of offices and office-holders and the division of authority that render it the most inefficient form of constitutional government in existence also serve to make it the most innocuous, and the best and the least oppressive to live under, in a state where there are no constitutional guarantees.<sup>21</sup> After democracy unbridled by law comes oligarchy or the lawless rule of the few, and, last and worst, tyranny, in which the rule of a single individual is neither

<sup>17</sup> 301 C-D.

<sup>20</sup> 300 A-B.

<sup>18</sup> 301 A-B.

<sup>21</sup> 303 A-B. Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>19</sup> 303 A.



checked and disciplined by law nor inspired and directed by statesmanship, but is directed by appetite and ignorance.<sup>22</sup>

Plato, it will be noted, is not so bitter against democracy as he was in the *Republic*. It has gone up a peg in his estimation and is now regarded, even in its worse form, as more, instead of less, desirable than oligarchy. This may be due, it has been suggested, to the fading of his bitterness over the death of Socrates.<sup>23</sup> As this bitterness became less acute, his memories may well have revived of the good account, apart from that incident, that the restored democracy under Thrasybulus gave of itself at Athens, in contrast to the misrule and the terror of the reign of the Four Hundred and the Thirty Tyrants.<sup>24</sup>

We now turn from the statesman as monarch to the political task that will devolve upon him—from the weaver to his web and his weaving, to revert again to the Platonic simile. The strands out of which he must fabricate the state are the unruly and often antagonistic natures of individual men. It is not merely that in the manufacture of his stuff he must first test the strength of these human threads, reject altogether the bad, and subordinate the weak. Even the best and strongest goods do not always go well together and must be harmonized and blended. Virtues like courage and gentleness are at cross-purposes and pull against each other. In matters of national policy, for example, the gentle and orderly people are for peace at any price, the courageous for rushing into war. Either class left to itself would bring about the ruination of a country. Moreover, courage is apt to degenerate into violence, gentleness into sluggishness or cowardice.

It is the business of the statesman to weave these contradictory elements together into a harmonious whole. This he will do in two ways, one mental, the other physical. He will implant in the souls of men true and rational opinions about the honorable and the just and the good and their opposites, which will tame and civilize the courageous, and will rescue the peaceful and orderly from becoming soft and silly and render them temperate and wise. And he will marry the bodies of his sub-

<sup>22</sup> 301 C; 302 E.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, note 2.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

jects to one another in such wise that the antagonistic virtues, instead of being inbred and producing mad or imbecile offspring, will offset each other and bring into the world children in whom temperance and courage are mingled in due proportion. Thus "one smooth and even web" of a just and temperate citizenry will be woven out of opposed qualities. Needless to say, the monarch must himself possess the proper combination of these virtues. For, although the merely "temperate ruler is very careful and just and safe," he "is wanting in thoroughness and go," whereas the purely courageous ruler "falls short in justice and caution, but has the power of action in a remarkable degree, and where either of these two qualities is wanting, there cities cannot altogether prosper either in their public or private life."<sup>25</sup>

Once more we may note important differences from the *Republic*. Plato is silent regarding communism of property. Although he still insists on eugenic control of marriage, there is no mention of holding women and children in common. No educational curriculum is set forth by which the citizens are to be instructed in the nature of the honorable, the just, and the temperate. The tri-partite division of the soul and of the state has disappeared. Spirit and appetite have vanished as the elements of which courage and moderation are the characteristic virtues, and these qualities are left without distinct supporting faculties. Specialization of classes is replaced by blending of temperaments. Justice is no longer an all-embracing virtue, but simply one among others. And the good seems to lie in striking a balance between temperance and courage.<sup>26</sup> In this, and also in what Plato has to say about the viciousness both of excess and defect, we may perhaps see once again the influence of the Pythagorean doctrine of Limit and a foreshadowing of the Aristotelian definition of virtue as a mean state lying between extremes.

## II

In the *Laws* we have Plato's last word on the best constitution of human society, and incidentally on many other subjects.

<sup>25</sup> 306-311.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-283.

Conceived very likely at the time he was working with Dionysius II, the dialogue was written during the last decade of his life and was interrupted by his death. According to ancient tradition it was published posthumously, without emendation and just as Plato left it, by his pupil, the astronomer, Philip of Opus.<sup>27</sup> It purports to be the advice given by an Athenian stranger to a Cretan who is about to found a new colony on the site of ancient Cnossus. A Spartan, too, "listens in" at the conversation, which occupies a hot summer's day walk from Cnossus to the cave and temple of Zeus not far away in the country. The conversation, however, resolves itself into an unrelieved monologue, and generally speaking, the work, in spite of splendid flashes and a tendency to improve towards the end, is distinctly inferior in style and dramatic power.

As we have already noted, the dialogue seems to mark the definite adoption of the opinion, already half expressed in the *Statesman*, that the greatest guarantee of good government by imperfect human beings lies even more in the kind of laws than in the class of officials that dominate the state.<sup>28</sup> It was not that Plato had ceased to believe in the philosopher-king and in giving him a free hand if he could be found. But his experiences at Syracuse may well have convinced him that it was beyond the power of education to produce such a being, and that mankind would have to content itself with "second-bests." In that case, the best practicable thing might be to draw up as perfect a code for the regulation of the state as was humanly possible, rather than to rely upon the training of superhumanly wise and able governors. At any rate, it is to the description of such a code that the climax of the *Laws* is devoted, though at the very end we find a reversion to the emphasis placed upon the necessity of the all-wise person, and new suggestions for government in which the guardians of the *Republic* reappear in changed and more sombre attire.

Plato, however, by no means scants the question of the best form of government. He has his idea of the kind of machinery most suited to the enforcement of his code. But the matter is

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 292. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 294 ff.



no longer vital. He is willing, as we shall see in a moment, to go far in yielding to the actual condition of affairs. Democracy, against which he had begun to relent in the *Statesman*, is now still more completely forgiven. Indeed he actually advocates it, in combination with constitutional monarchy, as the best obtainable, if not the most ideal system. Furthermore, so far as the monarchical element is concerned, he is no longer keen on a single king, but suggests rather a supreme council, and elected by the people at that, as the most efficient sort of executive. So, except for the final veering towards the philosopher-king, which characterizes the twelfth book, a mixture of democracy and elective aristocracy is his final political suggestion.

This conversion to the supremacy of law and the lowered stress on the importance of the particular make of political machine, as well as the more benevolent attitude towards democracy, were probably no mere grudging concession to realities from which he had at last admitted to himself he could not escape. He was an old man approaching eighty. He had lived much, seen much, suffered much. He had observed and meditated upon human nature, and from his very disillusionment he had harvested a ripe and sound knowledge of practical politics. Then, too, old age was retiring him from the world of affairs, which, even had his eyes still been focused upon it, might well appear to recede and to diminish in importance. But his eyes, as they tended to lose their focus upon the concrete and particular details of life, were also shifting elsewhere. While his mathematical and scientific interests still occupied his attention, the God who had so slowly and lately taken definite shape and place in his systematic thinking was also moving towards the centre of the stage, and theology and a theocratic moralism—one can scarcely call it ethics—had become a dominant feature in his philosophy. The important thing now was to figure out the rules and the regulations to which mankind must be subjected if it was to find favor in the divine sight. These rules were unchangeable and admitted of no discussion save perhaps by the very old and wise. They must be enforced at all costs. But with the machinery for enforcing

them Plato was no longer so concerned. It might well be a relative and a variable thing. For it, and for it almost alone among human institutions, no hard and fast rule could be laid down.

If Plato, however, gave a little with one hand, towards the end, he took much more away with the other. In the *Republic*, though he had described at length the only good form of government, he had suggested little specific legislation, on the ground that under the guidance of all-wise governors the mass of the citizens could be permitted considerable latitude in the conduct of their business and the arrangements of their private life. Now, however, while they may be allowed more of a finger in a less hard-baked political pie, their social and economic life is tied hand and foot by a multitude of prescriptions and prohibitions backed by the will of God. There is no more of the insistence in the *Statesman* that law is at the best an unfortunate necessity, and that it must be flexible, easy of repeal, and constantly re-adapted to changing conditions and, so far as possible, to the differences and the merits of individual cases. The code, prescribed by God, is once and for all delivered unto mankind.

But this is not all. Had Plato grown more tender, more sympathetic, and more broad-minded as his piety grew more concentrated and more theological in tone—and it is not impossible that the two growths should occur together—things would have gone better. The laws he laid down, inflexible and all-invading though they were, might still have been the enabling acts of a system of values conceived in as liberal and reasonable a spirit, and tempered with the same Hellenic heritage of balance and moderation and many-sidedness, as characterizes the scheme set forth in the *Philebus*. But Plato, as he aged, seems to have turned, not more humanely, but more austere, devout. The dualistic, puritanical strain in his nature, which had so long contended within him against his racial naturalism and humanity, had, it would appear, definitely gained the upper hand. And the severity of which he had become the victim broke out, not only in the character of the rules he promulgated for the guidance of human life, but in the oppression and

"strong-arm" methods he advocated for enforcing them. He was now ready to put people to death, if need be, for the glory of God and the Faith.

It has been suggested, to be sure, that the gathering strength of the dialogue towards the close, and the reversion in the twelfth book to the philosopher-kings and the reign of wisdom, contain a promise which Plato did not live to fulfil. We might have seen, we are told, another sunrise of the old genius, in whose radiance the Platonic code would have been justified, not only religiously but rationally, and revealed as the inevitable result of bringing supreme intelligence to bear upon the problems of human society.<sup>29</sup> Be that as it may, the greater part of the work gives the impression of being written before the dawn in the cold, grey light in which the nocturnal council of philosopher-astronomer-kings habitually sat, when it met to determine the destiny and plan the happiness of the world.

The first four books of the *Laws* constitute a triple introduction to the subject, social, historical, and political. Plato begins by pointing out that the state should be organized primarily for peace, not for war, and that the end at which its legal code should aim ought to be virtue rather than mere military efficiency.<sup>30</sup> The cultivation of wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage is the true business of the legislator.<sup>31</sup> Of these four virtues, temperance is most to the fore, as it was in the *Statesman*, since it is the most concerned with withstanding and curbing the inroads of pleasure upon the moral life. The love of pleasure is the most pressing problem for the lawmaker, and stern measures must be devised, not only for dealing with sexual irregularities and excessive drinking,<sup>32</sup> but with the sphere of amusement and relaxation in general. Music, song, the dance, the drama, have a profound ethical effect, and help turn a man to good or ill. Singing and dancing, indeed, are the natural and spontaneous outcries and movements of the body.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 342 ff.

<sup>30</sup> I, 625 C-631 B.

<sup>31</sup> 631 B-632 D.

<sup>32</sup> 636 A-643 A; 645 D-646 B; II, 675 E-674 A.



Hence disciplining them to harmonious and moral melody and rhythm is of great importance. To this end, they should be carefully censored, along with the other arts, and should be judged good or bad, not by a standard of pleasurable-ness, but according as they conduce to moral excellence, in which alone true enjoyment and true beauty can be found. All dancing should be before the Lord, all singing should be hymns in his honor.<sup>33</sup>

Wine in moderation is a useful means for mellowing the participants in this sacred merriment. The young, to be sure, do not need its stimulation and should be forbidden its use. God has given it rather to the old "to lighten the sourness of old age; that in age we may renew our youth and forget our sorrows; and also in order that the nature of the soul, like iron melted in the fire, may become softer and so more impressionable."<sup>34</sup> But at no age should wine cause us to overstep the bounds of perfect decorum.

We need not pause over this discussion of the arts, except to remember the explanations we gave of Plato's attitude in the Republic. Later, we shall find him even more severe. But for the moment we have to follow him in the historical introduction to which he turns in the third book. The deluge, we are told, left man in an idyllic state, without laws or letters, primitive in his wants and arts, but at the same time peaceful, simple, and more manly, temperate, and just than the men of to-day. Then the evolution of modern society began.<sup>35</sup> At first nomadic and patriarchal in their customs, men eventually turned agricultural, settled in communities, and, though still governed by ancient tradition, felt the need of laws and magistrates. These communities soon grew into cities, such as made war upon Troy, and the cities again federated into kingdoms like ancient Argos, Messene, and Lacedaemon. And these kingdoms, in their turn, formed a confederacy to ward off the Asiatics.<sup>36</sup> But they eventually fell because the rulers lost their sense of the true good, became proud and luxurious, and tended to become despotic. Sparta alone was saved because of

<sup>33</sup> II, 652 A-673 A.

<sup>34</sup> 666 A-C.

<sup>35</sup> III, 677 A-680 A.

<sup>36</sup> 680 B-685 D.

the curb her dual monarchy and the institution of the Ephors, or overseers, laid upon the kingship. Absolute monarchy, however, persisted in Asia, among the Persians.<sup>37</sup>

Meantime Athens had developed democracy, which is the other of the "two mother forms of states from which the rest may be truly said to be derived."<sup>38</sup> Monarchy worked well at first among the Persians, but declined owing to lack of education in their princes and the consequent rise of despotism.<sup>39</sup> So, too, democracy gave a good account of itself in Athens at the beginning. At the time of the Persian invasion the Athenians were a united, law-abiding, and reverent people. But just as despotism enslaved the Persians, so unbridled freedom dissolved Athens. This spirit of license was due in large part to the innovation of the artists. In the good old days the multitude listened in reverent silence, without clapping or hissing, to the traditional forms of music. Then the poets broke away from the conventions. "They were men of genius, but they had no perception of what is just and lawful in music; raging like Bacchants and possessed with inordinate delights—mingling lamentations with hymns, and paeans with dithyrambs; imitating the sounds of the flute and the lyre, and making one general confusion; ignorantly affirming that music has no truth, and, whether good or bad, can only be judged of rightly by the pleasure of the hearer." Furthermore they made their appeal, not to the educated, but to the multitude, and thus inspired the masses with the idea that they were capable of knowing the good from the bad.<sup>40</sup> And this conceit spread to other spheres of life, and begat, first, a spirit of general disobedience, and then the attempt to escape the control and exhortation "of father, mother, elders, and when near the end, the control of laws also; and at the very end there is the contempt of oaths and pledges, and no regard at all for the Gods."<sup>41</sup>

This indictment, which sounds strangely familiar to our ears to-day, suggests to Plato, when taken together with his reflections upon the evils of tyranny, that the best form of government will be a mean between the two extremes of slavery

<sup>37</sup> 686 A-692 B.

<sup>39</sup> 694 A-698 A.

<sup>41</sup> 701 B-C.

<sup>38</sup> 693 D.

<sup>40</sup> 700 A-701 B.

and license, and that the legislator should aim at combining freedom with unity and the exercise of intelligence. On this basis he begins, in the fourth book, to construct the framework for the state.<sup>42</sup> There are a few preliminary remarks about the best geographical site and the most desirable sort of population. The site should have "a fair proportion of hill and plain and wood" and be sufficiently distant from the sea to avoid the luxury and the cosmopolitanism that are the curse of a great port and centre of maritime trade.<sup>43</sup> In a later passage Plato adds that it should be set upon a hill, that it should be protected by frontier fortifications but should have no walls, save perhaps a circle of houses capable of use for defense, and that it should be clean and well drained.<sup>44</sup> The population should be Hellenic, but drawn from different races with different institutions, since a stock of a single sort and imbued with a single set of traditions will not lend itself easily to a novel constitution.<sup>45</sup> But, even so, the new system will probably have to be set up by force, and for this purpose it will be necessary to call in a wise tyrant to initiate the new régime.<sup>46</sup>

The government, however, that he will institute will not bear the name of any existing form of political organization. It will be called after God, from whom its laws derive and to whose imitation and service its citizens are dedicated. Its magistrates will be chosen, not from the rich and the strong, but from those who are obedient to the divine commandments. Only that man and that city can flourish which walk humbly with God and fear his justice. For "he who is lifted up with pride, or elated by wealth, or rank, or beauty, who is young and foolish, and has a soul hot with insolence, and thinks he has no need of any guide or ruler, but is able to be the guide of others, he, I say, is left deserted of God . . . and in a short time he pays a penalty which justice cannot but approve, and is utterly destroyed and his family and city with him." Wherefore the wise man is a follower of God, takes him as his measure, and is like him so far as is humanly possible.<sup>47</sup> So, too, the godly state has the Olympian deities and its special patron divinities for its foun-

<sup>42</sup> 701 D-702 E.<sup>44</sup> VI, 778 C-779 D.<sup>46</sup> 709 A-712 A.<sup>43</sup> 704 A-707 D.<sup>45</sup> 708 A-708 D.<sup>47</sup> 712 B-717 A.



dation, and the successive storeys in the scaffolding of its pious edifice are reverence, first for the Gods of the underworld, and after them for the lesser spirits and heroes and private and ancestral deities, then due respect paid to parents, both the living and the dead, and finally "the rites of hospitality taught by heaven," and the multitudinous obligations towards one's neighbors.<sup>48</sup>

Into this general frame the more explicit regulations will be fitted, but they will always be tied back into the general scheme by persuasive prefaces explaining their relation to piety and virtue and justifying in this way their mandatory clauses. For example, the laws prescribing and regulating marriage will have a prologue setting forth that marriage is a means to the immortality of the individual in the continued life of the race, and that for a man voluntarily to deprive himself of this gift is impiety and therefore properly punished by the penalties the law prescribes.<sup>49</sup> These introductions will create good-will in people, and by appealing to their understanding will predispose them to obey the commands embodied in the laws. Hitherto, unfortunately, legislators have dispensed with persuasion, and their codes have simply "laid down the law" and coerced men into obedience without giving reasons for their rules and regulations.<sup>50</sup>

We have not, however, quite finished our religious framework. Next to his Gods, a man's soul is his most divine possession, and should be honored next after them. But the soul has a dual nature, "the better and superior, which rules, and the worse and inferior, which serves; and the ruling part . . . is always to be preferred to the subject." Now the better part of the soul is not honored by devices like self-praise and self-excuse and self-indulgence, as men think, or yet by following the easy path and avoiding the difficult, or by clinging to life and fearing death, or by preferring beauty to virtue, or by laying up riches at the sacrifice of honesty. On the contrary, it is being foully dishonored, and its birthright is being sold for a mess of pottage. Worse still, evil-doing is transforming it into the likeness of evil. The glory of man is "to follow the

<sup>48</sup> 717 A-718 B.

<sup>49</sup> 718 C-721 E.

<sup>50</sup> 721 E-724 B.

better and improve the inferior, which is susceptible of improvement, as far as this is possible." The body also must be honored, not, however, by excessive beauty or size or strength or swiftness, or even health, as some believe, but rather by a mean and moderate amount of these endowments. For too much of them "makes the soul braggart and insolent."<sup>51</sup>

The same is true of an excess of wealth and property and worldly distinction, which breed hatred and envy as well. Once more, reverence for God, for parents, for neighbors, for strangers, and for law is the heritage a man should seek to bequeath to his children. So far as the things the law does not touch are concerned, a man should be brought up to know and to tell the truth; to be generous and without envy, eager to share his goodness and virtue with others; to be brave but gentle; to show mercy to others where their vice is curable, but to be inflexible in dealing with incurable wickedness; to love, not himself, but the right above all else; to recognize and be willing to bow to superior wisdom in others; and to exercise self-control in all matters. Thus he will be safeguarded against the assaults of pleasure and pain, and will turn to the life of virtue as the most truly pleasant life.<sup>52</sup>

The religious and moral scaffolding is now complete, and Plato turns to the code of laws that is to give it body and weight. This code may be divided into two parts, one providing a constitution for the state, the other setting forth the legislation that the governmental machinery is to put into effect. To constitutional law Plato devotes himself first. As we begin with a clean slate, we may assume that we are free from the undesirable elements that trouble ordinary states and from the financial difficulties that harass most governments. Our territory "must be sufficient to maintain a certain number of inhabitants in a moderate way of life," and that number Plato fixes on mathematical grounds at 5040. Communism for all, such as was advocated in the *Republic* for the guardians, would be ideal, but it is impracticable. We must, then, reconcile ourselves to the fact that our constitution will only be second-best.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> V, 726 A-728 E.

<sup>52</sup> 728 B-734 E.

<sup>53</sup> 734 E-739 E.

Since community of property is impossible, some means of equitable distribution must be worked out, and to this Plato devotes the rest of the fifth book. Land and houses will be equally divided, and this equality will be maintained, so far as can be, by laws governing inheritance. Personal property cannot be so equalized, but undue acquisition should be curbed by prohibitions against the possession of precious metals except in the form of currency, and against dowers and the lending of money at interest or secured by promissory notes. Furthermore, all surplus above a certain profit determined by the original value of the individual's lot of land shall be returned to the state. The inevitable inequalities that will creep in in spite of these regulations may, however, be used with political benefit as a basis for class distinctions in dividing up the electorate, and on this basis Plato divides his citizens into four classes. The land itself will be allotted in two sections, one in the city, the other in the country, so that each man may have both a town and a country house. For political purposes the citizens will also be divided into twelve sections or groups.<sup>54</sup>

We next turn to the machinery of government. After describing the provisional measures necessary to set it up, Plato proceeds to develop his scheme. The whole body of citizens, divided into the four classes with which we are already familiar, forms the electorate—subject to the restriction that no one may exercise the suffrage who has not completed his military training. Voting is mandatory upon the two upper classes but optional with the others.<sup>55</sup> Thirty-seven guardians of the law are directly voted for by all alike, by choosing first a provisional list of three hundred and then reducing it by a series of eliminating ballots. A council of three hundred and sixty with seventy representatives from each class is also chosen annually. Here the process of election is much more complicated and involves a combination of selection and elision so arranged that the wealthier classes have more to say in the final choice.<sup>56</sup> This mode of election, Plato tells us, strikes a “mean between monarchy and democracy” such as ought always

<sup>54</sup> V, 740 A–745 E.

<sup>56</sup> 757 A–E. Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 332 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. VI, 764 A.



to obtain in a state. By using it we secure that relative equality which alone is just.<sup>57</sup> The council thus elected will be divided into twelve parts, each one of which will exercise office for a month.<sup>58</sup>

Of the other officers, some, like the generals and the keepers of the temple treasure, shall be elected by the assembly. Others, like the priests, shall be chosen by lot in order that God may participate directly in the choice, and still others shall be appointed.<sup>59</sup> The defense of the city proper is entrusted to the troops under arms; that of the outlying districts is undertaken by a kind of constabulary consisting of groups of wardens and watchers chosen by the different tribes. These are charged not only with maintaining fortifications but with the construction and maintenance of roads, the care of streams and provisions for water supply and irrigation, the building of gymnasiums and public baths, and in general with a minute supervision of the country-side. They will also act as magistrates in minor disputes. Their discipline must be strict and semi-military, and they are enjoined against oppressing in any way the country people.

There shall also be three wardens of the city elected from the highest class by a combination of universal suffrage and eliminating lot.<sup>60</sup> Their duties will resemble those of the country wardens. Three similar officials elected in the same way will have charge of the meeting place of the assembly. Then, too, there must be supervisors of gymnastic exercises and superintendents of schools, and judges of music and singing. But, most important of all, there must be a minister of education. He must be married, and a parent, and be over fifty years old. Elected by the magistrates, he will supervise the whole educational establishment of the state.<sup>61</sup>

Having thus dealt with the administrative branch of the government, Plato turns to consider the judiciary. Differences that cannot be settled by the private mediation of friends will have to be taken to the lawcourts. These courts will be of

<sup>57</sup> 757 A-E. Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 332 ff.

<sup>58</sup> 758 B-E.

<sup>59</sup> 759 A-760 A.

<sup>60</sup> 760 A-763 D.

<sup>61</sup> 763 D-766 B.

two kinds, according as the suits involve simply individuals or an individual *vs.* the people, and of two degrees, courts of common pleas and of appeal. Each tribe will have its lower courts, the judges of which shall be chosen by lot. The officials shall elect from among themselves the judges of the court of appeals.<sup>62</sup>

The rest of the sixth book is devoted to matters that we may more conveniently treat when we come to examine the code of laws. In the seventh book Plato takes up the question of education. This begins with the proper care of the expectant mother. The early infancy of the child is also important, as then the foundations of physical and moral well-being in later life are laid down. Babies should not be frightened, since cowardice is born of early terrors, and they should also be spared, so far as possible, sorrow and pain. At the age of three, children should begin to play together, and should be taught games and sports. These should be standardized with a view to encouraging moral character, and there should be little or no change and innovation. At the age of six the sexes should be separated, and both boys and girls should learn to play at soldiers and thus learn the rudiments of military training. Useful military exercises like wrestling must also be taught.<sup>63</sup> Generally speaking, the education of girls should resemble that of boys in all respects.<sup>64</sup>

When they are ten, children should be taught to read and write, and from that age till sixteen they should be taught literature and music, which, it goes without saying, should be carefully censored with a view to producing an edifying moral effect.<sup>65</sup> Dancing also must be censored in the same way.<sup>66</sup> Nor can the drama be too carefully supervised. Attendance at comedies may be permitted, since an understanding of the laughable contributes by contrast to the high seriousness in which youth should be bred, but play acting should be left strictly to "slaves and hired strangers." Even the high tragedians should not be licensed to perform their works "until the

<sup>62</sup> 766 D-768 E.

<sup>65</sup> 800 A-804 B; 809 B-813 A.

<sup>63</sup> 788 A-799 C.

<sup>66</sup> 814 D-816 D.

<sup>64</sup> 805 C-806 C.

magistrates have determined whether their poetry may be recited and is fit for publication or not.”<sup>67</sup>

The same moral purpose must pervade even the higher education of the more mature. Only those studies which are innocent and of benefit to the state can be included in it.<sup>68</sup> Mathematics, even if it has nothing else to recommend it, is at least a wholly innocent and proper subject. Moreover, being an ardent mathematician himself, Plato feels that it is easy for everyone to learn, and even amusing.<sup>69</sup> With the high favor in which Plato holds it as a means of disciplining the mind we are already familiar. We are not therefore surprised to find him once more making it the staple of his curriculum of higher education.

This curriculum follows in many respects that set forth in the *Republic*. First comes arithmetic, which is indispensable to the pursuit of all forms of exact knowledge. Instruction in it should be begun early by means of the arithmetical games for children in use in Egypt. It should be followed by geometry, of which, Plato feels, the Greeks have as yet only the foggiest notion, witness their confusion of the commensurable and the incommensurable—a confusion, we might say, also underlying modern attempts to square the circle. Finally, and here there is a great divergence from the *Republic*, comes astronomy, which Plato now regards as the queen of the sciences and elevates to the position formerly held by dialectic. At this point, too, he interpolates an enlightened protest against considering impious any inquiry “into the supreme God and the nature of the universe . . . and the causes of things”<sup>70</sup>—a protest that he seems presently to forget, as we shall soon see.

But Plato is in a hurry to get to the laws themselves, and lets his scheme of education go at that. In the eighth book, after a short discussion of the religious festivals, major and minor, monthly and daily, that should be instituted as an aid to keeping the people ever in mind of God, and after some re-

<sup>67</sup> 816 D–817 E. The tense of the quotation has been changed.

<sup>68</sup> 820 D.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> 817 E–822 C.



marks about the necessity of limiting athletics to such exercises as conduce to military proficiency and therefore to the security and welfare of the state, he comes at last to grips with his subject.<sup>71</sup> The first point that he tackles is the regulation of sexual relations. In the sixth book he had already expanded his sample preamble about marriage into ampler form. The purpose of sexual relations, he had there pointed out, was not the happiness of the individual but the preservation and well-being of the community. Therefore marriage was obligatory, or at least could be avoided after the age of thirty-five only under a penalty of social displeasure as well as the payment of a fine. Furthermore, marriages must be so arranged as not only to produce that mingling of opposite qualities advocated in the *Statesman*, but also to equalize inequalities of wealth. Eugenics, too, such as the avoidance of drunkenness and of anything else injurious to the health, must be insisted on during the begetting period.<sup>72</sup> For ten years both husband and wife should soberly, gravely, and advisedly devote themselves to the business of procreating children for the state. Failure to produce should be cause for divorce. Marital disputes on this subject should be punished if they could not be harmonized, and adultery should be severely penalized. And all intercourse, even within the marriage bond, should be frowned upon unless it were for the express purpose of procreation.<sup>73</sup>

In the eighth book this last point is emphasized. Not only does he now frown upon love between members of the same sex, normal to the Greek society of his time, which he had accepted more or less as a matter of course in the earlier dialogues, and had, indeed, considered to be peculiarly well fitted for sublimation into love of the Ideas, but he insists that virginity shall be the rule for both sexes until marriage, that extra-marital relations shall be forbidden, and that even within the marriage tie intercourse, except for reproduction, shall be discouraged.<sup>74</sup> Here Plato seems to have receded from an earlier recognition, intimated in the *Republic*, of the value of

<sup>71</sup> 828 A-835 D.

<sup>73</sup> 773 A-776 B; 783 D-785 B.

<sup>72</sup> VI, 773 A-776 C.

<sup>74</sup> 836 B-841 E. Cf. I, 636 A-D.

sex as an enrichment of the life of the individual, quite apart from its function of perpetuating the species. In fact, his attitude in the matter has become almost Pauline. Sex is inherently evil, its satisfaction on the physical plane is wantonness pure and simple, and is an obstacle to the salvation of the soul. The avowed purpose of his restrictions is to save people, willy nilly, from the lusts of the flesh, which is now revealed as the arch-enemy of the life of the spirit.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time, when it comes to the point of enforcing these restrictions, Plato shows himself suddenly hard-headed and worldly wise. He sees the uselessness of passing repressive laws on the subject, and advocates indirect means of gaining the desired end. A sentiment in favor of continence must be fostered by education and exhortation. The ideal of the athlete in training should be held before the eyes of youth, and people, generally, should be kept so well exercised and fatigued by hard work that the urge of sex is not felt. Only a population thus trained will be willing to accept laws upholding a high standard in such matters.<sup>76</sup>

The remainder of the eighth book and part of the ninth deal with the laws regulating property and the conduct of business. Of all forms of property slaves make the most difficulty—and with them Plato had already dealt in Book VI. A distinction, he had said, must be made between good and bad slaves, but it should be remembered that bad slaves are often made such by the injustice, distrust, and harsh treatment of their masters. All slaves alike ought to be dealt with fairly and properly. But they should never be treated familiarly, and when they are really at fault they should be punished, not admonished and argued with as if they were freemen. Moreover, it will help matters, if slaves are always foreigners and speak a language different from that of their masters. In these circumstances they are more easily held in subjection.<sup>77</sup>

Turning now to real property we find a number of regulations designed to prevent individuals from encroaching upon one another's land, agricultural products, water-rights, and the

<sup>75</sup> 835 D-826 A.

<sup>76</sup> 839 E-841 E.

<sup>77</sup> 776 B-778 A.

like, and for distributing the produce of the soil among the freemen, the slaves, and the resident foreign population. The actual business of distribution, as well as the carrying on of all handicrafts should be attended to, not by the citizens, but by slaves and foreigners. The citizen is too occupied with securing and preserving the public order of the state to be bothered with buying and selling. Again, each artisan will be sufficiently occupied with attending to his particular trade, and shall be allowed to do one thing and one thing only. So far as the importation and exportation of goods are concerned, there shall be no "tariff walls" and no export duties. There must, however, be a ban on the importation of all luxuries and unnecessary articles, and a similar embargo on the export of anything needed in the country.<sup>78</sup>

Money, of course, is necessary as a medium of exchange, but all buying on credit should be at the seller's risk. No recovery at law will be allowed. Buying or selling in excess of what the law allows will be registered by the state. Subject to these conditions foreigners shall be allowed to settle and conduct their business without taxation. Twenty years, however, shall be the limit of their period of residence, except in exceptional cases.<sup>79</sup>

So far, we have been moving within the domain of what we should call civil law, in which the question of penalties has been largely incidental and has been answered by the payment of fines, or, at the worst, by an extra-legal disapproval on the part of society. Now, in the ninth book, we enter the criminal sphere of major offenses against property, the person, and God, in which the problem of punishment becomes acute. We have on our hands two tasks—first, that of apportioning properly the penalty to the crime, and second, the complication introduced by the difference between voluntary and involuntary acts. The causes of crime and the purpose of punishment have also to be considered.

As methods of punishment Plato proposes degrading exposure in public places, corporal punishment, imprisonment, segregation in some lonely place, and, in extreme cases, death. With

<sup>78</sup> 842 E-849 D.

<sup>79</sup> 849 E-850 D.



the machinery of bringing the malefactor into court he is not particularly concerned; but he insists that all criminals shall be apprehended, even for a single offense and even if they have fled the country; and he is at pains to define a method of court procedure that shall ensure the accused a fair and open trial.<sup>80</sup>

But a fair trial involves not only legal and objective considerations but psychological and subjective ones. In the first place, if all men do injustice involuntarily, out of ignorance of their best interests, how can they be held to account for their deeds and justly punished? And, again, how can it be right to subject men to punishments that make them worse off than they were before?<sup>81</sup> Obviously the criminal situation needs to be overhauled. The evil-doer cannot be treated in the cavalier manner in which slaves are doctored. We cannot say simply "you have done this, therefore you must take this."<sup>82</sup> To begin with, the deed must be put in its proper perspective. Its criminality cannot lie simply in the hurt or damage that it does. Benefits wrongly conferred, may be as hurtful as a *bona fide* hurt. Therefore, if objective harmfulness is to be our standard, they may be as wrong and unrighteous as any crime. We must go back of the actual deed to the intention or principle that inspires it, and judge its unrighteousness or criminality by that intention rather than by the hurt it does.

We have, then, in a wrong two different elements which cannot be righted in the same way. The objective element of damage is righted on the principle of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. What has been taken away can be given back, what has been ruined can be repaired or replaced, so far as possible. But the subjective element of intention, in which criminality resides, cannot be righted by vengeance. Here an eye for an eye is without justification. Retribution must lead to reformation. Punishment must aim at curing the evil-doer. It should kill him, only if he proves to be incurable. On the point that crime is a disease, a blindness, of the soul and should be treated as such, and that the only just punishments are primarily remedial, Plato cannot too strongly insist.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> 855 A-856 A.

<sup>81</sup> 859 D-861 A.

<sup>82</sup> 857 B-E.

<sup>83</sup> 861 A-863 A.

In order to devise the cure the cause must be known. Crime has three sources—passion, which violently forces the soul to action; pleasure, which by deceiving her with a false good persuades her into evil-doing; and ignorance, which may misguide her either through sheer lack of knowledge or through the conceit of a know-it-all. Injustice, or unrighteousness, lies in the domination of the soul by the passions “whether they do any harm or not”; justice, or righteousness, in possessing and obeying knowledge of “what is best for the whole life of man.” At the same time, thought may also enter into the commission of a crime, in which case we have premeditation.<sup>84</sup>

But although all evil-doing is involuntary and a kind of disease, and arises from a blinding of the higher part of the soul by passion or pleasure or ignorance, the individual, Plato seems to think, is still morally responsible for his crimes and may justly be called to account for them. Passion and pleasure and ignorance are not external to the soul, and the pressure they bring to bear upon her is not comparable to outer compulsion, or even to the influence of a drug or of insanity. A man acting at the behest of any one of them is acting of himself, and is expressing himself, however misguided that self may be. He is still, as Aristotle was later to point out, “the moving principle” and source of his behavior, and as such is responsible for it, whatever may be the reasons for his being the kind of principle and source he is.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, Plato feels, a man is not so completely responsible for acts committed on the spur of the moment and under the lash of passion or pleasure as he is for those involving premeditation.<sup>86</sup> Both, of course, are involuntary in the sense that they are done in ignorance of the true good. Both show that the soul is blind. But in the one case, we might say, the seizure is sudden and momentary, and the soul quickly comes to herself again and regrets the blindness of her act, although she cannot claim an alibi. Still, such impetuous action is, at least, like involuntary behavior. It runs true to type. In the case of the premeditated act, however, there is a deliberate and

<sup>84</sup> 863 A–864 C.

<sup>86</sup> 866 E–867 C.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 352–358.

prolonged blindness to the soul's welfare, a storing up of evil intentions, and a lack of remorse when the deed is finally committed, that smack of the rational character of the really voluntary act and resemble the pursuit of the true good.<sup>87</sup> So it is that we find Plato sharply distinguishing premeditated from unpremeditated crime and proposing for it much severer penalties.<sup>88</sup> This distinction is of the utmost importance in dealing with crimes against the person, as, for example, homicide.

With these considerations in mind Plato turns to the details of his criminal code. Sedition, treason, and sacrileges like temple-robbing are all to be punishable by death.<sup>89</sup> Ordinary theft incurs a penalty of repayment of twice the amount stolen.<sup>90</sup> The various degrees of homicide are then reviewed. Even unintentional or accidental homicide requires religious purification and sometimes compensation, but no further atonement is necessary. Most intentional but unpremeditated cases shall be punished by exile for a term of years varying according to circumstances. Premeditated, first-degree murder demands the infliction of the death penalty on agent and instigator (if there be one) alike.<sup>91</sup> Premeditated killing in war, in self-defense, in the defense of one's family or for the protection of one's property or one's honor, or in vengeance for violence done one's chastity, is justifiable and exacts no penalty.<sup>92</sup>

Wounding with intent to kill should rank as murder, but is punishable only with exile for life, except in attempted parricide or fratricide, or in case a slave assaults his master. Wounds inflicted without premeditation but in passion, shall be atoned for by the payment of large fines to the victim. Accidental woundings shall require only suitable compensation.<sup>93</sup> Lesser assaults, such as striking another person, shall be dealt with according to the comparative ages and relationships of the aggressor and his victim—generally by short terms of imprisonment where the aggressor is of lesser rank or age. Perpetual exile awaits the child who strikes his parent. The slave who

<sup>87</sup> 866 D-867 A.

<sup>88</sup> 864 C-867 B-C.

<sup>89</sup> 854 A-855 A; 856 B-857 A.

<sup>90</sup> 857 A-B.

<sup>91</sup> 864 C-874 C.

<sup>92</sup> 874 B-C.

<sup>93</sup> 875 A-879 B.



dares raise his hand against a freeman shall be delivered over to the injured party to be beaten at the latter's will.<sup>94</sup>

The tenth book, to which we now pass, is one of the most important and the most famous in the *Laws*. As we already know, it reveals the final theological phase of Plato's metaphysical system. It is an able presentation of the theistic case; it portrays a deity—or deities—of a very high moral order; and it abounds in splendid passages that catch, like clouds at sunset, some of the radiance of the old Platonic manner. At the same time, it is a sullen and an angry sky in which the sun of Plato's genius is setting. We see him suddenly standing there in the lowering light of an incredible intolerance—an almost sinister figure, hard-shelled, crabbed, fanatical, and harsh, incapable of brooking any interpretation of the universe except his own, and ready to cram his beliefs down other people's throats even if he has to choke them to death in so doing.

Still, there are clearer and softer lights in the picture, which ought not to escape us. After all, Plato is logical to the end, and advocates no more than every theologian ought to favor, who sees in the fabric of the world a clear theological pattern with which the strands of human righteousness and happiness are, to his eye, inextricably interwoven.<sup>95</sup> For, in such circumstances, the pattern that strikes the eye so convincingly is not merely the only true but the only right pattern. It alone can supply the configuration of human life that leads to salvation. To make it equally obvious and dominant for others is, then, no mere intellectual exercise. It is the highest duty one man can perform towards another, and in fulfilling that duty force ought to be employed where persuasion fails. So, too, the detection of any other pattern in the universe implies more than an innocent wandering and play of the mind among different combinations suggested by the warp and woof of events. It means that the soul has got hold of a false clue to living, a pattern that, if taken to heart, will throw her moral life into disorder and imperil her safety, not only here on earth, but hereafter.

Anybody, then, who is wholly convinced of the exclusive truth

<sup>94</sup> 879 B-882 C.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 367-368.

of the particular theological pattern he sees in things ought to consider heresy the gravest of crimes, dislocating, as it does, the only right scale of values, and evoking ideals and standards inimical to the social organization prescribed by that pattern. And he ought, if he has the courage of his convictions, to act accordingly, and rigorously to put down disbelief wherever he finds it. The hesitation to take strong measures, felt by so many otherwise devoted adherents of this or that creed, and the tolerance they display, are really weakness masquerading as virtue, and a mistaken kindness at that, since indulgence towards the dissenter is fatal to his best interests. Plato, for all his seeming harshness, is more rational, once his premises are given, more honest, and, if we take into account the damage done the soul by heresy, more humane. He sees the logical implications—or is it the *reductio ad absurdum*?—of his, or, for that matter, of any too assured theology. There are no sentimental mists in his evening light. If that light is hard and sinister, it is at least clear.

Moreover, it must be remembered that Plato regarded forcible suppression of heresy as a last resort. Every resource of argument and persuasion was first to be employed to make the nonconformist see the rationality of the Platonic point of view. Only if he could not be convinced of its soundness by an appeal to his intellect and common sense, were drastic measures for ensuring conformity to be used.<sup>96</sup> Though this cannot be said to have mellowed the atmosphere, it made it perhaps a little less black and forbidding.

With the tenets of Plato's theology we are already familiar. Heresy, naturally, consisted in a denial of one or all of its three cardinal points<sup>97</sup>—the existence of the Gods,<sup>98</sup> their righteousness, justice, and providential direction both of the world and of human affairs,<sup>99</sup> and the incorruptibility of their administration and their justice by fawning prayers and sacrifices.<sup>100</sup> Doubt on any of these points was blasphemy, but it was less insolent to believe that the Gods did not exist at all

<sup>96</sup> 885 B 889.

<sup>97</sup> 885 B 889.

<sup>98</sup> 899.

<sup>99</sup> 899 D-905 D.

<sup>100</sup> 905 D-907 A.

than that, existing, they lolled in idleness, careless of the welfare of the universe and of mankind. Worst of all, however, was the so-called religious attitude which, professing to believe in their existence and their righteousness, sought to flatter and cajole them by offerings and incantations into dealing leniently with sin, "as if wolves were to toss a portion of their prey to the dogs, and they, mollified by the gift, suffered them to tear the flocks."<sup>101</sup>

In dealing with these three heresies, we must distinguish those disbelievers whose moral character is above reproach, and who are exemplary citizens, from those "who besides believing that the world is devoid of Gods are intemperate" and immoral in their behavior, though quick-witted and tenacious in their mental processes. The former are not so dangerous, since they are loose only in thought and conversation, but the latter breed all sorts of intellectual and moral pestilence, tyrants, demagogues, generals, sophists, hypocritical and venial priests, and celebrants of unholy mysteries.

The punishment of heretics must be apportioned accordingly. Arrested on the information—and informing is made compulsory upon all citizens—of whoever hears or sees an impious word or deed, the accused shall have the degree of his guilt determined by the magistrates. Minor cases shall be punished in the city gaol, along with common offenders. The morally upright and open disbelievers shall be sent for a period of five years to a "House of Reformation" near the meeting place of the "nocturnal council" which is here mentioned for the first time. There they shall be held in solitary confinement save for visits from the nocturnal council, "and with them let them converse with a view to the improvement of their soul's health." Such as have been converted by these talks may be restored to society at the end of the five years' term, but those who remain unconverted, and are condemned a second time, shall be put to death. As for the hypocrites, however, who privately disbelieve, but make a pretense of religion, and "in contempt of mankind conjure the souls of the living and say they can conjure the dead and promise to charm the



Gods with sacrifices and prayers, and will utterly overthrow individuals, and whole houses and states for the sake of money"—let them be sent for life to a special prison "in some wild and desolate region in the centre of the country," and after death let their bodies be cast out unburied beyond the frontiers of the country.<sup>102</sup>

As a further preventive of heresy there should be an established cult, conducted in public temples by an accredited priesthood. All private and household cults should be strictly forbidden. Shrines should not be permitted in private houses, and all citizens should be required to pay their religious devotions in the places of common worship. Once more, it is obligatory upon all citizens to report any infraction of this rule. Failure to comply on the part of the accused shall be penalized. The celebration in a spirit of levity of any rite, be it in private or in public, shall be punished by death.<sup>103</sup>

This discussion cannot but impress painfully the reader of Plato. Perhaps its most pettily disagreeable feature is the system of espionage and information which it makes mandatory upon all the citizens of the ideal state. Nor, apparently, is the spying and the informing to be confined to cases of heresy. Again and again this duty of the citizen is insisted upon. Indeed, in the fifth book there is a comprehensive passage dealing with this point in which a double crown of virtue is conferred upon the just man who also "informs the rulers of the injustice of others," and the palm is awarded to him "who co-operates with the rulers in correcting the citizens as far as he can."<sup>104</sup> This is to turn the whole body of citizens into a self-constituted anti-vice society of amateur private detectives, and to diffuse throughout it a general spirit of mutual surveillance such as is advocated and exemplified to-day by the theory and practice of our modern unofficial organizations for suppressing vice or for inflicting a pet code of morality upon the state at large. From one point of view, of course, and to a certain degree, Plato's requirement is reasonable enough. But it is an open question whether the greater part of the evil

<sup>102</sup> 907 A-909 D.

<sup>104</sup> 730 D.

<sup>103</sup> 909 D-910 E.

detected and suppressed in this way is not less harmful both to the state and to the character of the individual than are the manner of ferreting it out and the incidental assumption of police power by private persons. Certainly, if the behavior of our modern anti-vice leagues is any index, the kind of corruption sown in otherwise reputable persons by the spirit of spying and informing seems to be far worse than most of the corruption it corrects. And it is permissible to feel that a fairly large degree and wide diffusion of dissoluteness and impiety among a citizenry are preferable morally to the universal prevalence among them of the attitude and the activities recommended by Plato.

In the eleventh book Plato returns from heaven to earth and busies himself with sundry details. Laws regarding property are elaborated, and rules governing restitution and disputed ownership are laid down. Trade and finance are once more discussed, buying on credit is again denounced, price-fixing is arranged, and measures to protect against fraud, adulteration, and false representation are proposed. Retail trade, because it encourages a desire for undue profits, must be controlled and licensed, and limited to strangers, and extortion must be forestalled by determining the permissible profits. Contracts must be enforced, and non-fulfilment of them ought to be taken before the lawcourts, and to be punished by a fine of double the original amount involved.<sup>105</sup>

The willing of property should be subjected to legal restrictions. The "dead hand" must not be allowed to interfere unduly with the living. Inheritance will be arranged so that the "one man, one lot" system is interfered with as little as possible. This may require adoption of an heir or the cutting off a son who is already possessed of a house. When a man dies intestate, his daughters shall be married off in such wise as to preserve the lot system. If there are no children the next of kin shall inherit. Orphan children shall be wards in chancery under the charge of the guardians of the law, who shall see to their education and the management of their property. Finally, there shall be a tribunal of magistrates

<sup>105</sup> 913 A-922 A.

or a special court to settle all difficulties arising in these matters.<sup>106</sup>

Plato next considers laws regulating family life. In case of dissension between father and son, the son may be disowned, if the family consents. If disowned, he must seek adoption in another family, failing which he must emigrate. An insane man is to be restrained from the control of his family and his property. Divorce with the condition of re-marriage may be granted to a husband and wife who cannot agree. Widowers with children should not remarry. Otherwise they must. Widows with children should not remarry unless they are "too young to live virtuously without a husband." Parents must be cared for by their children, and their wishes must be respected by them, for the figure "of a father or a grandfather or a mother stricken by years" is a wonderful thing, "far higher than that of a lifeless image." Neglect of parents shall be punished by "stripes and bonds" if the faulty children are young, otherwise by severe penalties determined by a court of elders. Here, too, private informing of such neglect is the duty of any one who observes it.<sup>107</sup>

After a discussion of attempted injury by sorcery or poison, in the course of which Plato once more insists upon the preventive and remedial, rather than the retributive function of punishment, and after arranging for the care of madmen under restraint, Plato takes up what we to-day might call libel laws. "No one shall speak evil of another . . . for out of the imprecations which men utter against one another and the feminine habit of casting aspersions on one another, and using foul names . . . the greatest enmities and hatreds spring up." Nor shall men cast ridicule upon one another. Good-natured satire, however, may be allowed the poets, subject to the permission of the minister of education.<sup>108</sup>

The book closes with some odds and ends of legislation. Begging is prohibited. The responsibility of the owner for damage done by his slaves or domestic animals is discussed. Rules regarding witnesses in the lawcourts are drawn up and

<sup>106</sup> 922 A-928 D.

<sup>108</sup> 932 E-936 B.

<sup>107</sup> 928 D-932 D.



penalties provided for perjury. Specious pleading on the part of lawyers is forbidden. The unscrupulous lawyer who receives fees for taking a shady case shall be deported, if a foreigner, put to death, if a citizen.<sup>109</sup>

Finally, in the twelfth and last book Plato takes up such crimes against the state as false reports on the part of heralds and ambassadors and the theft of public property. He then proceeds to treat of offenses against military discipline, like disobedience, refusal to bear arms, desertion, and cowardice, and also considers certain rules necessitated by international relations. Desertion and the dodging of military service shall be tried by a military court and punished at the court's discretion. Generally speaking, it may be said that Plato in most cases advocates leaving to the judge the determination of the penalty, rather than prescribing it by law. Cowardice, since unfortunately it is impossible to change the coward into a woman, is best punished by fining him and cashiering him permanently from the service. Trials for cowardice, however, should be carefully conducted, and informers should be certain, before lodging complaint, that the action was not accidental or prudent rather than craven.<sup>110</sup>

The question of international relations is delicate. Plato's aim is to keep his state pure and undefiled by foreign influences. It would be better, he feels, if each community were hermetically sealed from its neighbors and there were no international intercourse whatsoever. However, given the world as it is, and states as imperfect as they are, the harm done by emigration, immigration, and travel is of no consequence. Absolute isolation and the measures necessary to maintain it would give a city a reputation for churlishness and barbarism in the eyes of the world, which is to be avoided. In these circumstances, we must make the best of the situation. This we may do by forbidding all citizens under forty to travel abroad in a private capacity. Heralds, ambassadors, and the like will, of course, have to be sent to foreign cities. Moreover, to keep an eye on the rest of the world it is desirable to despatch "spectators," or, as we should say, intelligence officers, to other

<sup>109</sup> 936 C-938 C.

<sup>110</sup> 941 A-945 A.

countries, who may observe and report upon anything they think of interest or advantage to their own city. These officers shall make their reports to the "nocturnal council," which here makes its bow for the second time, and the success or failure of their missions shall be judged and requited according as they return home personally the better or the worse for their experience.<sup>111</sup>

So much for regulations with respect to citizens leaving the country. Now as to immigration. Foreigners shall be divided into four kinds—the casual trader, the visitor to festivals, the official representative, and the intelligence officer, or spectator. The first class shall be decently and hospitably treated, but kept apart as much as possible, and allowed to make no innovations. The second shall be properly entertained, but their sojourn shall be limited. The third shall be received with the honors due their position. The fourth, presumably older men, shall be given every facility for acquainting themselves with what is good in the city, and on their departure shall be sent away with gifts and other marks of respect.<sup>112</sup>

We might now suppose that the Platonic code was complete. But Plato keeps having after-thoughts, and now wanders back to such subjects as private property, the constitution of the lawcourts and the conduct of funerals, with which last item, fitly enough, he finally does write *fnis* to his rules and regulations. Going surety for another and searching houses for property in dispute, the propriety of statutes of limitation where property is concerned, the principle that possession is nine points of the law, intimidation of witnesses, the reception of stolen property and of exiles, bribery, private warfare, taxation, and the proper cost of offerings to the Gods—all receive his attention. The machinery of the law is next on the list. Cases between individuals shall be tried first before arbiters agreed upon by both parties. From their decision appeal may be taken to the tribal courts, of which, he repeats, there are to be twelve, one for each division of the land. Finally the case may be carried to a high court of selected judges. Too frequent appeal is prevented by the rule that where the decision

<sup>111</sup> 949 C-952 D.

<sup>112</sup> 952 D-953 E.

of the lower is upheld by the higher court, the defendant shall be liable for increased damages. The lower courts may reasonably be entrusted to younger judges. All judges should be learned in the law of the land and should regard their function as that of healers and correctors, giving their judgments accordingly, and condemning to death only the incurably wicked. Their decisions shall be enforced within a month at the peril of the loser in the case being deprived of all his goods. Contempt of court is punishable by death.<sup>113</sup>

We leave now the living to bury the living beneath this mass of legislation and come to the dead. Cemeteries should be in out-of-the-way spots on land that cannot be used for cultivation. Funerals should be simple, and their cost should be legally fixed. A representative of the law should be present to see that all is properly attended to. Noisy mourning and the exhibition of the corpse in the open street had better be forbidden.<sup>114</sup>

Two problems still remain to be solved. In the first place, how are the magistrates entrusted with the enforcement of the laws to be kept up to the mark? Secondly, how are the laws themselves to be preserved, kept irreversible, and handed down, a faith once and for all delivered unto the saints, from generation to generation? The first problem Plato solves by an incidental suggestion, sandwiched into the international part of the code. There shall be a corps of examiners or censors, or, as we might call them, inspectors-general, which, after its first institution, shall be added to yearly by the election of three members selected from the most esteemed citizens of over fifty years of age. The highest honors shall pertain to this office, and its occupants shall hold it on good behavior till they have reached the age of seventy-five, when they shall be retired. At death they shall receive a splendid public funeral if they have proved faithful to their trust. Their function shall be continually to oversee the work of the magistrates, whom they have the power to remove from office, to penalize as they see fit, and even to condemn to death. Any magistrate, however, who feels that he has been unjustly dealt with, may appeal his case and

<sup>113</sup> 953 E-958 C.

<sup>114</sup> 958 C-960 B.



cite the examiners before a selected court. If the court acquits him, he may then lodge a complaint against them. Otherwise let such part of his original sentence as admits of being doubled be assessed twice over against him.<sup>115</sup>

The examiners, it will be noted, are a political after-thought of Plato's and are absent from his system of government as he first develops it. So, too, in providing for maintaining the laws as irreversible as Fate, Plato introduces another and more important innovation, which seems, as we have already remarked, to betoken a tendency on his part to return to the philosopher-kings of the *Republic*. The "nocturnal council," after a fitful and casual dawning, at last emerges into the light of day. To it will be entrusted the duty of maintaining the constitution and the laws intact. To this end it will be composed of the ten oldest guardians of the law, "all those who have obtained prizes of virtue," and the spectators, or intelligence officers, who have visited foreign countries. To these shall be added an equal number of eminent young men, nominated, one each, by each of the elders. Thus we shall have a body combining age and youth, mind and sense, perception and reflection, and knowledge of home affairs with that of the outside world, which will be expert in the ends and means of true statesmanship and authoritative in the inculcation of true virtue.<sup>116</sup>

To govern the state well and lay down the nature of what is right, the members of this nocturnal council must, of course, have undergone a special training calculated to acquaint them with the four forms of virtue and with the unity that underlies the four. They must know the nature of the good and the honorable, and must be profound theologians versed in all the evidence and all the arguments for the existence of the Gods and the providential government of the world. A correct understanding and use of these arguments pre-supposes, in its turn, an acceptance of the doctrine of the priority and immortality of the soul-principle and of its direction of the physical world. And this again is best inculcated by studying the wonders of astronomy, since in the exactitude of the movements of the heavenly bodies the proof that "mind is the orderer of the uni-

<sup>115</sup> 845 B-948 B.

<sup>116</sup> 961 A-965 A.

verse" is seen in its most convincing shape. Further than this we cannot at present go in exactly determining the education or the powers of our nocturnal council of astronomer-guardians. We are taking a chance, to be sure, in letting it go at that, but the best thing we can do is, "if this our divine assembly can only be established," to hand our city over to them. Thus our dream of the best practicable state, which we have just set forth, may perhaps become a reality.

We should perhaps add a final word about the *Laws* from the point of view of the history of jurisprudence and education. The Academy as we have already seen, was primarily a school of political science, and therefore also a law school. Most of the rules and regulations Plato laid down were based upon the codes of the various Greek cities and particularly upon contemporary Athenian law. He was frequently asked for advice by colonies, or by long established states that were engaged in framing or altering their constitutions. The *Laws*, then, may well have been a codification of such existing law as he considered desirable, with additions of his own devising. As such it became the basis of Hellenistic law, and later an important source of Roman jurisprudence. So, all of our modern codes, to the extent that they are founded upon Roman law or are influenced by it, are remote descendants, in part or whole, of this last work of Plato's which we have just been studying.<sup>117</sup>

Again, it has been pointed out that, from the point of view of the education, Plato's proposals in the *Laws* amount to the establishment of a system of primary and secondary education, as we should call it to-day. His scheme of organization was embodied in the educational institutions of the Hellenistic period, and passed thence to Rome and eventually to the grammar schools of the Middle Ages. If, then, the founding of the Academy made Plato the father of the modern university, he might also claim by way of the *Laws* to be the father of our modern system of secondary education.<sup>118</sup> Modern, too, is his keen interest in child psychology, his advocacy of education,

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 302 ff., 225 ff. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-296.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 311. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

even of the higher sort, for women, and his combination of the schools for boys and girls alike with gymnasia and playgrounds.<sup>119</sup>

### III

At the end of our long journey through the Platonic philosophy we may stop for a moment and review briefly the more general contours of the spectacle of all time and existence that has slowly been unfolded before our eyes. Naturally, our memorandum must be of the sketchiest kind—a thing of headings and headlines “featuring” merely the “high spots” of our discussion and designed simply to label the successive stages of our tour. The first thing to be noted is the question whether the earlier dialogues set forth Plato’s own doctrine, or whether those preceding the so-called “critical” group must not rather be regarded as an exposition of Socrates’ teaching. In view of this doubt our decision to stick to the traditional opinion and to treat all of Plato as Platonic was, we may remember, a matter of convenience rather than of dogmatic conviction.

We next took up the three avenues, emotional, moral, and intellectual, by which we approached Plato’s central doctrine of the Ideas. An analysis of love, of moral conduct and social organization, and of the process of knowledge showed in each case that none of them made sense or had real validity unless such things as beauty, goodness, and truth had a real existence of their own, independent and apart from the passing show of events in which they were enacted. The fact that we were not indifferent spectators of the world, but were passionately attracted by or interested in much that we found there, presupposed, as we saw in the *Lysis*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phaedrus*, the existence in and for itself of an absolute and universal quality of loveliness whose presence in things made them lovable. Again, in the *Republic*, we found knowledge mounting straight away from disordered and meaningless subjective sensation, through a growing confidence in the objective meaning of experience, to a recognition of its stable and organized character and a working out of rough and ready rules expressive of its re-

<sup>119</sup> Barker, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, also p. 380.



liable behavior; and thence to a *scientific* apprehension of the universal and changeless laws and principles underlying these rules, and eventually to a *dialectical* grasp of the interlocking of these principles in a single coherent system. Unless, then, the universe had a real intelligible structure embedded in its sensible stuff, knowledge, we decided, would be a farce, and science and philosophy would both be futile.

The approach to the Ideas by way of ethics proved to be more tortuous. In the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*, we had first to clear the ground of such misconceptions of the nature of the good as the hedonistic doctrine of pleasure, be it of the moment only, or in the long run. Then, in order to determine the nature of righteousness in the individual, we had first to discover it on a larger and more easily readable scale in the state. This involved us in the *Republic* in an elaborate and detailed study of the structure of an ideal commonwealth, in an interesting analysis of the psychology of the individual, and incidentally in a discussion of the place of the fine arts in the moral life. But at length we reached a definition of justice, or righteousness, as we may call it, that would hold good in all times and places, for particular men and for human society alike. Hence we concluded that moral standards, like aesthetic values and the laws and forms in which knowledge comes to rest, were universal, immutable, and eternal things.

Turn, then, where we might in experience, we always found beneath the confused and agitated surface of the flux a stable pattern of abstract and universal laws, types, forms, values and the like, which the flow of sensible phenomena was continually re-exemplifying. This pattern was suffused throughout with a quality of rationality in whose light it assumed a single Form of its own which was more than the mere aggregate of the particular laws and values that composed it. There was, then, a kind of Form of Forms, a general "lay of the land," that gave focus and perspective to the constituent features of the ideal landscape. This underlying principle of unity, Plato called the Idea of the Good. Since the system of Forms, both in its wholeness and in its details, was unalterable, imperishable, simple and self-identical, and was everywhere and

at all times the same, it might seem to have a reality far superior to that of the perishable, composite, ever-changing and ever-dissolving local and temporary physical objects that received being and name from embodying it. Indeed, the solid, tangible, material element in things seemed on the point of vanishing into comparative, if not absolute, nothingness.

But this centring of reality in a supersensible world of Forms or Ideas, inevitable though it was, involved Plato in many difficulties. In the first place it raised the problem, mentioned in the *Parmenides*, of Ideas of evil and ugly things. Science demanded that such Ideas exist, since the evil and the ugly were capable of explanation; but aesthetics and ethics could not tolerate anything that destroyed, as the existence of such Ideas would destroy, the essential beauty and moral goodness of real existence. This problem Plato almost entirely ignored.

Again, the relation of the Ideas to the minds that entertained and to the sensible objects that embodied them had to be worked out, and the physical world had to be kept from evaporating into sheer illusion. The first of these questions we found Plato answering in the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus* with his famous doctrine of knowledge as recollection. We were, to be sure, confined to the senses for all we knew, and the senses never perceived anything but particular sensible data. But our minds, having been conversant in a pre-natal existence with the Ideas, still remembered them after birth, and were reminded of them by the data introduced by the senses. Thus the sensible world could suggest to the mind the existence of an intelligible order. This doctrine, as we also saw, involved Plato in a theory of immortality in which were commingled the notions of timeless union with the eternal, of limited and comparatively short periods of personal and temporal survival, and finally of a prolonged process of reincarnation, not of personality, but of moral character. These concepts he developed in the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, and in myths in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*.

The ability of an alien medium, like the flux, to enact the Ideas in sensible objects Plato tried to explain by such meta-

phors as those of imitation and participation. Such figures of speech, Aristotle immediately pointed out, did nothing to solve the problem. Indeed, Aristotle continued, Plato's theory of Ideas had merely split the universe in two, and left each half incapable of uniting in any way with the other. The intelligible half merely reduplicated but did not explain the sensible half. At the back of this criticism lay the feeling that Plato conceived the Ideas as having an original, enacted metaphysical existence of their own outside the particular sensible objects that embodied them—a feeling that has persisted to this day and is the traditional and conservative interpretation of the Platonic position.

In view, however, of the difficulties created by such an interpretation, we found some modern scholars attacking it and claiming that Plato intended to attribute, not a metaphysical, but a logical existence only, to the Ideas. The status of the Ideas was not that of divine "substances," but that of natural laws and moral and aesthetic ideals, which, although they are different and separable from their particular, sensible examples, are never found in operation elsewhere. In other words, apart from the sensible phenomena that enacted them, the Ideas were not in themselves a drama, but merely the script of the play. The amateur presentation of them by the world of sense was the only *presentation* they received. They were not also being enacted professionally outside the flux by an ideal, all-star cast in a kind of metaphysical New York. For, if they had to be conceived not merely as a script equally appropriable by all comers, but also as a troupe of actors, copywriting, staging and reciting it, then they could not possibly be in their heaven of a New York and in a thousand places "on the road" in the sensible world at one and the same time. Conceive the Ideas, however, not as a professional, all-star, "first-night" production of the world-drama but simply as its script, and as a script, at that, not written on any particular paper, or confined to a particular author's mind, and the difficulty would cease. As script pure and simple, any number of "copies" of them could co-exist, each one of which contained the play in its entirety. Any number of particular presentations could share



the same script without dividing it up, and could stage it as a whole simultaneously in any number of particular sensible theatres without self-contradiction. In that case, imitation and participation would be excellent metaphors, and the doctrine of recollection, instead of being fantastic, would be an accurate psychological description of the sense of recognition of a long-lost friend that accompanies the solution of a problem or the hitting on a truth. These points, we were further told, were recognized by Plato, and the *Parmenides* was an attempt on his part to clear himself of the misconception that he considered the Ideas metaphysical substances, and to make it plain that he regarded them only as logical essences. In view of this controversy we left the question of the status of the Ideas open and turned from the *Parmenides* to the other critical dialogues.

There we found Plato reviewing in the *Philebus* the ethical situation and endeavoring, not only to re-state the ingredients of the good life, but to determine with mathematical precision the proportions in which the elements should be mixed. This, taken together with certain reports and criticisms of Aristotle, led us to consider the last phase assumed by the Ideas in Plato's mind—that of mathematical formulae. Difficult as certain aspects of the question were, we concluded that Plato was merely trying in his way to realize the ideal of modern science, and to express in the equivalent of our curves and equations the behavior of nature and of man alike.

We next passed to problems connected with the existence and nature of the sensible world. The falsification of Reality by appearance raised the problem of error, with which we found Plato struggling in the *Theaetetus*, and the more general question of the possibility of making negative statements, to which the *Sophist* was devoted. Negation, we discovered, indicated difference of one sort of being from another, not absolute not-being; and this discovery salvaged for us the real existence of the sensible world. The fact that sensible objects were *not* the Ideas, no longer excluded them from the sphere of reality. It merely put them on a different, though *real* footing. What this footing rested on we had now to explore.

We were thus led in the *Timaeus* to develop a theory of the

material principle in which the sensible world is grounded. Here we found the mathematical interest strong in Plato, and an attempt on his part to conceive matter in geometrical terms and to reduce it to empty space. But another problem also pressed for an answer. The sensible world was full of life and motion for which a cause had to be discovered. This could be found neither in space, which was a purely passive receptacle, nor in the Ideas, which, however we regarded them, were static, motionless entities. A third principle had, then, to be introduced to explain motion, and for this purpose Plato brought forward the soul, now conceived as an uncreated, self-originating, self-moving source of life and motion. In the later dialogues furthermore we found him tending to personify her and to make of her a personal Creator, designing all things for the best. This theological trend was especially explicit in the *Timaeus*, and in the *Laws*.

The reduction of matter to empty space, and the lodging of the origin of all motion and activity whatsoever in the soul-principle raised a final problem. The imperfection of the sensible world could no longer be attributed to the inferior nature of its substratum. Empty space was neutral and equally receptive of any form or motion that might be introduced into it. The cause of imperfection, then, could only lie in the Ideas or in the soul-principle. The question suggested in the *Parmenides* had raised its head again. But Plato could still ignore it, seeing that he had soul at his beck and call. Since she was the origin of all life and motion, to her must be referred the movements that interfered with the accomplishment of design and purpose, as well as those that furthered it. She had, then, to be of two sorts, a better and a worse. It was the inferior kind of soul that made things go wrong in the universe. This view, we may remember, was set forth in the *Laws*, the political portion of which is so recent in our minds that we need not review it.

Side by side with this explanation, however, lay a persistent tendency to attribute to matter a positive, obstructive inertia, and particularly to oppose the body as the source of evil in human life to the soul as the source of good. And a further

complication was introduced by a somewhat vague appeal to human free-will as a means of shifting the blame for human imperfection from God to man himself. But this solution was largely nullified by the insistence that in this life we are only reaping what we have sown in former existences. Nor did it ever emerge from the state of myth.

The Platonic metaphysics, then, magnificent as it was, we found to be loose-jointed and inconclusive in many respects. Behind this lack of complete articulateness we divined a nature at odds with itself. On the one hand, we saw that Plato fell heir to the great naturalistic, Pagan tradition that regarded the distinction between moral good and evil as merely a metaphysically superficial difference between the wise direction and the foolish misdirection of the same identical activities and energies, and sought human salvation not in the freeing of one portion of our nature from another, but in the harmonious co-operation of all the faculties with which man is naturally endowed. But, on the other, we found him equally heir to the mystical, Orphic tradition that divided the human being into two hostile camps, the body and the soul, and regarded the attainment of the human good as essentially a liberation of the one from the bondage of the other. Torn between the natural inclination to regard the flesh and the sensible world as a joy and the dualistic, supernatural command to deliver oneself from them as from a burden, Plato, we felt, was never at peace with himself or consistent in his picture of the spectacle of all time and existence. If anything, it seemed, the puritanical, non-naturalistic strain in him prevailed as he grew older, though even then we could not forget that in so late a work as the *Philebus*, which was perhaps inspired by a revival of Hedonism within the Academy, he appeared to be trying to formulate a scientific and unbiased ethical theory.

In spite, however, of this conflict in Plato's character and the obscurity and division of critical opinion that surrounded many of the most important points in his system, we could never lose sight of the grandeur of his work. The mists of controversy and indecision, through which his true meaning so often appeared darkly, did no more than swirl about the feet of



towering peaks that came as near to storming Heaven as man has ever come.

## IV

On Plato's death the leadership of the Academy fell to his nephew Speusippus, and again, eight years later, to Xenocrates, who outlived Aristotle. Of the lesser philosophical lights of the Academy at the time, such as Heracleides, and the astronomers, Philip of Opus and Eudoxus of Cnidus, we know little. Since this is the case, it is perhaps best to postpone our consideration of Speusippus and Xenocrates until we come, as we hope to do in a later book, to the history of the Academy as a whole. It is sufficient to remark here that they turned mathematical and mystical in their interpretation of their master, emphasized the Pythagorean elements in his teaching, and set rolling the stone of Neo-Pythagorean and Neo-Platonic speculation which gathered so much moss in Graeco-Roman times.



## APPENDIX





# I. CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

493 B. C.	First Persian Expedition against Athens. Abortive, however, because of the destruction by a storm of the Persian fleet.
490.	Second Persian Expedition under Darius. Signally defeated at the battle of Marathon.
Circ. 490.	<i>The philosopher Empedocles born at Acragas (Agrigentum) in Sicily; the philosopher Leucippus at Miletus or Elea; the philosopher Zeno, later a pupil of Parmenides, at Elea in Southern Italy. The philosopher Heracleitus in his prime at Ephesus in Asia Minor.</i>
490—480.	Growth of the power of Athens. Banishment of the statesman Aristides. Athenian policy in the hands of Themistocles. Building of the fleet. A congress held to decide on steps for coping with a new threatened Persian invasion.
Circ. 483.	<i>The philosopher Gorgias born at Leontini in Sicily.</i>
Circ. 481.	<i>The philosopher Protagoras born at Abdera in Thrace.<sup>1</sup></i>
481.	The historian Herodotus born at Halicarnassus in Asia Minor.
480.	The poet Euripides born at Salamis.
480—475.	<i>The philosopher Parmenides at his prime in Elea.</i>
480.	Third Persian invasion of Greece, under Xerxes. Battle of Thermopylae. Advance of the Persians to Athens. Defeat of the Persian fleet by the Athenians at Salamis and subsequent retreat of the Persian armies.
480.	Defeat by Syracuse and Acragas, at the battle of Himera, of a Carthaginian attack on Sicily.

<sup>1</sup> The birth of Protagoras, however, is placed as early as 500 B. C. by Burnet. Cf. *Greek Philosophy*, pp. 111-112.

478. Athens now the most powerful state in Greece. Defensive alliance against Persia of the islands of the Aegean under the hegemony of Athens, known as the Confederacy of Delos.
- Circ. 478. *The philosopher Xenophanes still alive in Sicily at the court of the tyrant Hiero of Syracuse.*
471. The historian Thucydides born at Athens.
- 471—469. *The philosopher Socrates born at Athens.*
- Circ. 470. *The philosopher Melissus born at Samos.*
- 468—461. Struggle for power between Cimon and Pericles at Athens, ending in the banishment of Cimon and the ascendancy of Pericles.
462. *The philosopher Anaxagoras called to Athens by Pericles.*
- 461—431. Transformation by Pericles of the Confederacy of Delos into the Athenian Empire. Extension of the Empire. Growth of commerce and wealth. Athens at the zenith of her power and brilliance. The Periclean Age and Circle. A "Golden Age" of art and literature, adorned by the poets Sophocles and Euripides; the historians Herodotus and Thucydides; the philosophers Anaxagoras, Protagoras, and the youthful Socrates; the painters Polygnotus and Panaenus; the sculptors Myron, Phidias, Paeonius, and Polyclitus; and Mnesicles and Ictinus, the architects of the Parthenon and the Propylaea. The "long walls" connecting Athens with the Peiraeus built.
- Circ. 460. *The philosopher Democritus, the pupil of Leucippus, born at Abdera in Thrace.*
456. The poet Aeschylus died at Gela in Sicily.
- Circ. 454. Removal of the treasury of the Delian League from Delos to Athens. An important step in converting the League into an Empire.
- Circ. 450. *Final uprising in the southern Italian cities against the Pythagorean Theocracy. The lodges of the Brotherhood were burnt, the members massacred, and the survivors fled for their lives, many of them to Thebes and elsewhere in Greece.*



- Circ. 450. *Birth at Megara or Gela of the philosopher Euclid, pupil of Socrates and founder of the Megaric School.*
- Circ. 449. *Visit of the philosophers Parmenides and Zeno to Athens. Interview with the youthful Socrates.*
- Circ. 448. *The poet Aristophanes born at Athens.*
- Circ. 444. *The philosopher Empedocles, in his prime, visited Thurii, where he probably met Protagoras and Herodotus.*
443. *The politician Thucydides (not the historian), a political opponent of Pericles, banished, leaving Pericles supreme. The subject-allies of the Confederacy now frankly taxed for Athenian purposes.*
440. *Incidentally to an unsuccessful attempt of the island of Samos to secede from the Empire, Athenian naval forces were defeated by the Samian fleet commanded by the philosopher Melissus of the Eleatic School.*
- Circ. 440. *Birth of Antisthenes, later a pupil of Socrates and founder of the Cynic School.*
- Circ. 435. *Birth at Cyrene in north Africa of Aristippus, later a pupil of Socrates and founder of the Cyrenaic School.*
432. *The philosopher Anaxagoras tried at Athens for materialistic views regarding the nature of the sun and the moon. Thrown into prison, he escaped and fled to Lampsacus on the Hellespont, where he died soon afterwards, highly respected and honored by his new, more liberal fellow-townsmen.*
431. *Outbreak of the long-drawn-out Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta. The popularity of Pericles already on the wane.*
- Circ. 430. *The philosopher Empedocles died; place unknown, but probably not in Sicily.*
429. *The Plague in Athens. Death of Pericles.*
427. *The philosopher Plato born at Athens.*
427. *Advent at Athens of the philosopher Gorgias at the head of an embassy from Leontini*

- and her allies to ask for help against Syracuse.*
- 421—416. Truce between Athens and Sparta. Political ascendancy of Alcibiades, the pupil and friend of Socrates.
415. Launching by Athens of the great "Sicilian Expedition" against Syracuse; the war with Sparta, also, having been renewed.
413. Decisive defeat of the Athenians at Syracuse. Revolt of Chios, Lesbos, and Miletus against Athenian domination. Beginning of the break-up of the Athenian Empire and of the decline of Athenian power.
- Circ. 411. *Protagoras tried for impiety and exiled from Athens. Shipwrecked and drowned en route for Sicily.*<sup>2</sup>
- 409—404. Great Carthaginian expedition against Sicily. Initial success. Himera, Selinus, and Acragas destroyed. Dionysius became tyrant of Syracuse. Carthaginian advance on Syracuse.
406. The poet Euripides died in Macedonia.
405. The Athenian fleet beaten and destroyed by the Spartans under Lysander at Aegispotami.
404. End of the Peloponnesian war. Surrender of Athens. Razing of the "long walls" and destruction of the fortifications. Athens reduced to a subject-ally of Sparta. Sparta now the dominant power in Greece.
404. Conclusion of peace between Carthage and Syracuse, by which the Carthaginians retained considerable territory and influence in Sicily.
404. The poet Sophocles died at Athens.
- 404—403. Establishment of an oligarchy at Athens. The Thirty Tyrants. Reign of terror.
403. Overthrow of the Oligarchy and re-establishment of the democracy at Athens.
399. *Trial and execution at Athens of Socrates on*

<sup>2</sup> The story of Protagoras' trial and exile is rejected by Burnet, who places his death in the early years of the Peloponnesian war. Cf. *Greek Philosophy*, pp. 111-112.

*charges of impiety and corruption of the youth by his teachings.*

399—395.

*Plato, along with other pupils, left Athens for political reasons. Many, Plato among them, took refuge with Euclid at Megara. Further possible travels of Plato in Egypt and Cyrene. Possible return to Athens about 395.*

399—394.

Sparta at war with Persia, as result of Persia's retaliatory expedition against Greek cities of Asia Minor that took part in the Anabasis of Cyrus. The Persian satrap, Tissaphernes, defeated by the Spartan King, Agesilaus. Persia in revenge stirred up Corinth against Sparta. Corinth joined by Thebes, Argos, and Athens. Aided by the Persians, the allies defeated the Spartan fleet at the battle of Cnidus (394) and inflicted so severe a check upon the nominally victorious Spartan army that the victors could not exploit their success, but retired to the Peloponnesus. The Athenian admiral Conon rebuilt the "long walls" with the aid of Persian money and men.

391.

The Carthaginians were all but expelled from Sicily by Dionysius I.

395—387.

*Possible further travels of Plato. Composition of the earlier dialogues Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Euthydemus, Protagoras, Gorgias, and Meno, and possibly the Symposium and the Phaedo, the first part of the Republic and Phaedrus.*

387.

*Plato's first trip to southern Italy and Sicily. Visited the Pythagoreans and particularly the philosopher Archytas at Tarentum. At the invitation of Dion, brother-in-law of Dionysius I of Syracuse, he extended his visit to Sicily and stayed at the tyrant's court. As the result of a quarrel with his host, he was sold into slavery, ransomed by a friend and returned to Athens.*

387.

Peace of Antalcidas between the Greek states and Persia. Greek cities of Asia Minor abandoned to Persia. Athens retained islands of



	Lemnos, Imbros, and Seyros. Foundations of second Athenian Empire laid.
Circ. 387.	<i>Plato founded his Academy at Athens.</i>
387—367.	<i>Plato taught at Athens. Composition of the rest of the Republic, of the Theætetus and the Parmenides.</i>
385.	<i>Birth of the philosopher Aristotle at Stagira in Thrace.</i>
383.	Birth of the anti-Macedonian orator Demosthenes.
382.	Birth of Philip of Macedon.
379—362.	Wars between Sparta and Thebes.
378.	Athens joined Thebes against Sparta. New Athenian Empire formed, consisting of a confederacy of seventy communities. Spartans repeatedly defeated at sea by the Athenians.
377.	<i>Death of the philosopher Euclid, the founder of the Megaric School.</i>
371.	The Battle of Leuctra. The Spartans signally defeated by the Thebans under Epaminondas. Sparta made peace with Thebes and Athens.
371—362.	Hegemony of Thebes.
370.	The Peloponnesus invaded by the Thebans under Epaminondas and Pelopidas. Sparta aided by Athens.
369.	Second Theban invasion of the Peloponnesus.
367.	Third Theban invasion of the Peloponnesus.
367.	Death of Dionysius I of Syracuse. Accession of Dionysius II under the tutelage of his uncle Dion, Plato's friend.
367.	<i>Plato's second trip to Syracuse, to instruct Dionysius II, at Dion's behest, in the art of government, and incidentally with the hope of trying out the theories of government expounded in the Republic.</i>
367.	<i>The youthful Aristotle came from Macedon to Athens during Plato's absence, and became a student at the Academy.</i>
366.	<i>Plato after an unfortunate and unsuccessful sojourn at Syracuse, embittered by Dionysius' exile of Dion, returned to Athens.</i>

365. *Death of the philosopher Antisthenes, founder of the Cynic School.*
362. Fourth Theban invasion of the Peloponnesus.
362. Battle of Mantinea. The Thebans successful, but Epaminondas killed. General peace made among all Greek states, from which Sparta alone held aloof.
361. *Plato's third trip to Syracuse at the invitation of Dionysius II, and in the hope of reconciling the tyrant with Dion. This trip as unsuccessful as the second. Plato finally disillusioned in his hopes of Syracuse. Quarrelled with Dionysius. Remained for a year virtually a prisoner. Plato returned to Athens.*
360. *Plato probably wrote the Sophist, and the Statesman.*
- Circ. 369—360? Accession of Philip II to the throne of Macedon.
359. *With the approval of Plato, Dion fitted out an expedition against his nephew Dionysius II. The expedition successful. Dionysius fled and Dion seized the city, only to be assassinated by his fellow-pupil at the Academy, Callippus.*
- 357—356. *Plato wrote the Timaeus, the Critias and the Laws.*
357. Philip of Macedon, extending his power in Thrace began his encroachment upon Athenian possessions. Alliance with Olynthus against Athens.
- 357—355. As a result of the so-called Social War of the Athenian League against Athens, the second Athenian Empire began to fall to pieces. Chios, Cos, Rhodes, and Byzantium revolted successfully and established their independence.
356. Birth of Alexander the Great.
- Circ. 356. *Death of the philosopher Aristippus, the founder of the Cyrenaic School.*
355. Beginning of the second Holy War by Thebes, Locris, and Thessaly against the Phocians, who had plundered the temple at Delphi. Philip

- of Macedon interfered in the struggle and defeated the Phocians.
352. Philip advanced as far as Thermopylae where he was opposed and his progress temporarily checked by an Athenian army.
351. Demosthenes delivered his first "Philippic," warning Athens against the rising power of Macedon.
348. The Chalcidic towns in Thrace, leagued with Athens against Philip, were insufficiently supported by her, and were conquered by him one by one.
347. *Death of Plato at Athens.*
346. Peace of Philocrates, by which Athens tamely ceded all occupied territory to Philip. Philip pushed through Thermopylae, advanced to Delphi, and had himself elected to the Amphictyonic Council.



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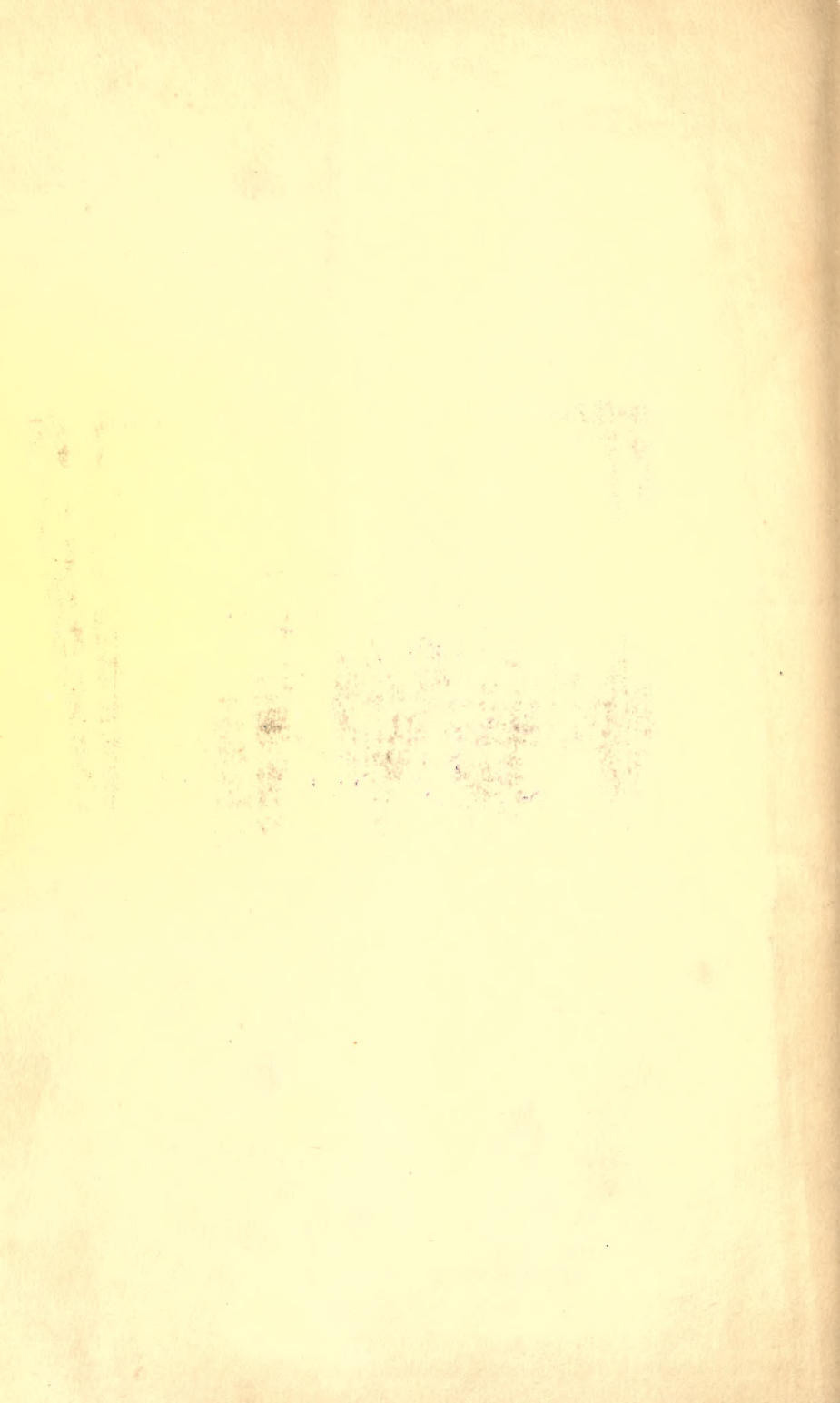

















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